

Too Much Beauty

Embracing Heaven

In the Farmers Market in Ellensburg, Washington, a small, university town that reminds me of my second hometown, McCook, Nebraska, sitting next to my paintings for sale, I read Jack Gilbert's "Refusing Heaven." His poems came in and out of me like breathing sweet air in the wilderness. I expected to have the same experience, with the same book, here in this tiled, adobe, butterscotch and lavender café, with machinery noises and radio music, but here the words clog. Jack sat in the cultured wilderness of his bold restraint, until he knew what needed to be felt, and then he wrote.

He was old when we met, because I was young then. Now we're both old, as far as that goes. He's still that much older, so I count him as a mentor. I might linger in this café, if I wanted to be entertained the way this café intends to entertain. I went to visit my last lover. We seemed happy to sit together, until she had to get back to her projects, and I had to leave. We hugged, and then she lightly kissed my neck. It was a bon-bon, left behind, in a newly abandoned prisoner-of-war camp. It was a sweet gift for the departing legions, from another band of departees.

The Love I Seek

The things I love, the first time I love them, are the same as their memory, once they're gone. The way I hold someone mirrors the way I might want to hold them, once more, when they can never be held again. The exquisite moment of love is the same as the terrifying moment of its loss. I seek the love that will tear my heart out, so I can sit in the eternity of my emptiness, and cherish what I cannot hold.

In The Hotel of Incidental Melodies

In The Hotel of Incidental Melodies, the manager plays music all night long, but in his heart of hearts, he prefers the silence of the forest. Some things never get done, in the minds of those who think about things getting done. In this last while, in one accumulated moment of being, the way an inkling occurs out of one's history, I lost the desire of loves not loved and bodies not known. I stopped looking at people as the future of things not yet known or

done. There's a tension in the undone past that has its cousin in the unmade future, and I've lost that tension, like a persistent ache that eventually goes away.

In India, ten years ago, a beautiful woman wanted me to go with her to the Taj Mahal. I never regretted not going. That rarity has become commonplace. I celebrate this burst of freedom by inhaling the smell of coffee. The smell is ancient and has no memory, or else all its memories became one, in this sweet moment of inhalation.

The Warm Café Air

In Seattle, leaning against a red wall, her athletic breasts in a white pullover, a young woman stands waiting for the restroom to open up. She reminds me of waiting, in a thousand places, for whatever is going to happen, in that sense of one's life that extends to the world, where everything is the way it's supposed to be. It's a welcoming magic of expectation that seems especially true when one is young. The warm café air gives the street air a cool virtue. The light is kind to the light. There comes a time when looking at a room has the same peace that a camera has, even when its aperture is as wide as possible. Not as young as she is, I've come out the other side, with my senses intact. Resting in wonder was once my pastime. Now it is my occupation.

Pero's Boy

The poet in me doesn't live in relationship. He could easily let us both die, if only he could keep us alive, to be this thing that we are. Nobody dies in the making of a poem, and the poet in me is not bloodthirsty. Does anyone believe the spirit of the universe has a separate thought for the life of anything within it, a thought that's not the same thought that it has for everything else?

Pero brought his four-year-old son to the game and left him sitting on the ground, with his arms around his knees, in the sporadic rain, the two of them yelling back and forth in Spanish. The boy seemed resigned to his fate. I went for a hat to put on my wet head. The boy was sad-eyed and shivering. I got a sweatshirt out of my bag and put it around his shoulders. Within minutes, his father sent him to the car, for the rest of the game. The boy was more attentive to his father than he was to a stranger.

Maybe Pero thought it was good for the boy to obey his father and patiently wait for his torture to be over, the way I waited for years for my parents to show the love in their hearts. I could still be waiting, but they died, and I have children of my own, with room in my heart to address these questions. And I have the kindness of a woman who says she loves me beyond our relationship. The poet in me sits waiting, for an opening in my concerns. That, amongst all this talk, is what makes me smile.

Uncle Basho

Jack Gilbert mentions Basho and Tolstoy in one of his poems like friends or beloved uncles in silent companionship. Carl Jung talks about the ancient borderwalker, whose job it was to walk the border of the tribe and report back, a kind of reassurance of the unknown at the edge of the known reality, as the prototype for the poet. The borderwalkers of prehistoric tribes might have few friends, perhaps only among the border walkers of other tribes. They had their singular life in common, their critical use to the tribe, their need to separate soon after their reunion, and their keen awareness of the close community of the few who did what they did.

The girl nearby, talking to her young suitor, with his preoccupied grin, turns reluctantly to glance briefly away. She turns to look at separation, at the romance of it. It's one last chance to get out of her entanglement. But her commitment is to the contract they both savor, not for its sexuality, as much as they might think, but for the end of their aloneness.

I used to go to the café in San Francisco and talk to an old man, Larry Fixel, another poet, like Basho or Tolstoy. We would look at women and laugh at our impossibilities. He was married, or had been, on one of his returns from walking the borders of this contiguous human consciousness. I am this café suitor, and I am the girl he imagines in his hands, and I dream of an ongoing union, out here on the stony path. Everything is possible in a poem.

I Awaken to This Brevity

I awaken to this brevity of life, where nothing happens but the entirety of being, when even this awareness is caught in the vice of occurring twice. Twice I breathe, in every breath, once for meaning, and once for life. I call out to her, I imagine her coming, I'm sure she's on her way, I look at every

car, not in hoary anticipation, the sugary bitter taste of desire, but in the life where I live and breathe, where I have no idea what's about to happen and I give it her name. I'm pulled apart by these pulls in my life, one pull, toward surrender in patient peace, the other, toward the pettiest of personal fears, like a mother with a child, and they're the same. I have the choice among my separate selves, to anticipate something bad happening, or to be present, with my eyes open. This pulling apart pulls parts from the center, that reveals the center more clearly than what's been cleared away.

The Table in the Corner

My friend looked at us, standing in front of the baked goods. He said we looked like we were from out of town. It was his way of saying he thought we were together. I think he thought that, but I don't know, I didn't ask. Instead, we took the table in the corner of this small town cowboy cafe, the three of us, and we danced our words together like old-timers. On the wall were photographs of cowboys on horseback and cowboys sitting around the campfire with their backs turned, as if we were being invited to look over their shoulder at the open range. I come to the edge of town to write, to leave town far enough behind to enter the open range, where she and I have no shared map of destination.

Conspiracy

The freeway, with majestic bare hills beyond, rises from the right, and the cars and trucks rise with it, as if they're being launched, until they disappear into the wall at the left side of the plate glass windows. Another constant band of cars and trucks appears at the highest point and slides gracefully down the wall at the right side of the windows. A mother, father, and daughter get out of their car. A desultory bunch, the daughter in her pushup bra, the mother in a scowl, the father in a ponytail and sleeveless tee, and already I've lost interest in their apparent drama. Then I see the sadness in their faces cast my way, as a kind of mourning. In a world of worn and broken hearts, how can one free oneself? Then I see that after the daughter's gone back to the car, the parents share a private dance in public, with raised eyebrows and a twinkle in the eye that dances from one to the other. It is a conspiracy the daughter might not be privy to, but I believe the blood will carry it.

The Code of Passionate Embrace

Even when we look at the same tree, and I say something about that tree, in our mother tongue, the gulf of misunderstanding between us is still enormous. We bring different complexities to the discussion of even a single scraggly tree in a tiny plot of earth, next to a parked car. Because she and I have refrained from being sexual, we've discovered bonds of knowing that might have been overridden by passion. My friend warned a younger man he knew that the code of his life, a bond of compatriots, was sealed in how well they could survive their pain, but, he continued, "Some of that pain is unnecessary, if not all of it." He said that when he finally learned to be free, he wanted to take back his prior life in pain. This is the nature of codes between those of us who have lived in pain. When you say tree to someone, you must know that the roots of any tree run deep in unseen soil. My loving friend has lived in this grove longer than she's been outside of it. She sees it large before her, and I see its trees. Free of her entanglement, she might become more than I can dream of, in my code of passionate embrace. I could cut her free from these trees with the celerity of a lumberjack, but the best cut is made by the one closest to the tree.

One Man's Wife

My brother in Illinois stands in front of a full-length mirror talking to himself, to the camera; to the striking woman he's dressed to be, in her short skirt, heels, and sweater. His wife, he calls her, with giant floating breasts that he kneads, to feel their soft weight in his hands. The nipples are buried beneath the breasts, against his skin. This is my brother, and I winced when I first saw his brazen drama.

"My darling," he moans, "oh, baby." Then he says, "This is my own true love." "I love you so much," he says to his image in the mirror. "This is my woman," he tells the camera. "I looked for her all my life. We're together now. This is all the woman I'll ever get. This is all the woman there is for me. That's just how it worked out. There she is." "Oh darlin'!" he moans. "This one's not getting away. Yeah! This one's home for the duration."

I see a glimmer of happiness in his accommodation. I see a kind of acceptance for one who couldn't find it any other way. He talks to the camera, to her, to himself, to whoever might be watching or listening. It's his testament to the triumph and tragedy of his love, a love that never found

a mirror in the heart of another human. And so he sings old blues songs, less badly than when he's among others.

"I don't look that bad. I don't sound that bad. And I've got a great body." "What other old woman looks this good?" he says. "I think I got it right. To have the perfect woman around, all the time. I've gotta learn to stand in these heels," he says. "I keep getting carried away. I looked for her all my life. I found her a couple of times, but she got away."

"If I were a carpenter," he sings, "and you were a two-by-four, would you marry me anyway?" It's his comedic reference to his being a Geppetto with his manufactured wife. "It's like acting," he says. "It's a costume, one I rather like," he says. "I'm not good at winking at the camera, but it's good at winking at me." My brother has been my lifelong refuge from condemnation, from others, and I honor his attempt at reconciliation.

These Outside Things of Wonder and Beauty

I used to get on the road and drive, to remember who I was, alone, clean, simple, in need of others, but content alone, like towns in the mountainous west, perched on slanted ground, where all that remains, is only what isn't blown away or found to be useless. My family drove to the mountains, every summer, and I would feel home again, stepping onto the gravel by the river in the wind with the smell of pine and the faint presence of brown bear and deer, not knowing I was walking alone in my heart, no longer separate from myself or anyone else.

There were amusement parks in the city, where the lights on the Ferris wheels and roller coasters were bright colors, against the night sky, and everything beyond my heartbeat was wiped away. Being as a child is not simply being what came before but being what remains. I might think I remain, in memory or artifact, like certain scenery, but the resonant reality is the undercurrent of who I am, that first found its place in these outside things of wonder and beauty.

In the Way of Our Glory

Van Gogh sat in the window of his glory, and his wife complained about the draft. "Come sit with me," he said, in every brush stroke, to anyone who would listen, and they ran him out of Arles on a joke. Shaking hands with

God can be a difficult and lonely business, even in the making of his glory. The remarkable thing in the movie, "Lust for Life," is how few of the characters actually look at the paintings. You'd think the movie was about a madman. I wrote her, "You'll never know how much I love you - this hurtful knowing that gets in the way of our glory."

There's love and kindness in the glow of a baked wall in the sun, in Nebraska, in the Yucatan, in India, and now here, in this high desert valley, where the wind blows, where she and I have met. As a boy on the prairie, I was available to the sun that has baked us since before there were walls, when someone first thought, "If I could raise this hard-packed earth, I could warm myself against the wind." I absorb this heat on the wall of my willingness to stand myself up.

The Desire of the Habitually Homeless

Desire comes on me like a storm from behind, like a bear at my back, and gives me too much power where I didn't need it. I look at the curve of her breast, and I lose interest in the love we all inhabit, that we leave, only to gather up doubts and fears. Destination is the desire of the habitually homeless.

Driving down a certain street in my hometown, the overhanging trees made it seem like a tunnel to somewhere. Each time I drove that street, I entered that same tunnel to somewhere. I didn't care that I emerged at the same intersection, with no thought of ever having arrived anywhere different. I cared only, that for a time, on the road through the trees, I forgot about destination, on a journey without desire.

Two-Dollar Gas

It isn't only the people who die who are missed, but the times we thought were indelible. She's reading something I wrote about another woman, and the story makes present what no longer exists, or so it seems. After a certain age, similar images are translucent. The gasoline prices on their giant signs are susceptible to the same nostalgia as the quaint prices from a past we fondly recall. She's temporarily in India, reading about my time with someone else. It almost breaks her heart to think this other woman and I are not together. One-dollar gas. Two-dollar gas. They're like children growing up before our eyes. We want to remember them when they were small. I

loved one woman, and now I love another. The common element isn't even myself as a lover, but the translucent moment that makes the past seem powerful and precious.

The indelible moment is as corruptible as temporal love is. I can never remember the moment that defines real love. Instead, I remember everyone and everything around it. When I define myself in the remembering of love, I lose what keeps me present. I need to be present, to love anyone, in this moment. I haven't forgotten my last desired love. Neither can I forget this woman who feels sadness for another lover who isn't her. Whenever I think of either woman, that woman is here in memory, and when I love either one, all love is here, not in the memory of them, but in the memory of love itself.

Trying to Turn the Moment Into Time

I stood on the street, ten years and three thousand miles apart, and I watched two great men look at me with sensual eyes. Leonard Bernstein and Alan Ginsburg gave me, a young man then, and not known to them, the look I recognize in my own eyes as a look meant for girls and women, and I was happy to see it from those men. I thought for a moment that there was something in my character or spirit that drew their attention to who I was, and not what I was, as an apparently attractive young man. And even if I was wrong, I knew it wasn't wrong for me to feel it. I turned away from both incidents, feeling rewarded. I had felt seen, in a simple recognition of spirit in the flesh.

I've seen that look in women, when I was already in the chase, trying to turn the moment into time, preparing to make something happen from a glance at someone else's presence. We love people with the kind of presence that engages and entertains us by its spark and bravado, but there's a deeper presence of being I failed to recognize in my life, far longer than necessary. A certain depth in others went unrecognized in my sight, for as long as it did in myself. I'm drawn to this woman at such a depth that I run to the surface, but my deeper desire is to know what lies beneath and beyond. I want to know what remains, when everything else has been taken away, whether it has been or not.

Something of a Third

When you touch a brush of color to another color, and both colors are wet,

something of a third takes place. We are wet with each other, I said, the pretext of our separation is destroyed, the way Matisse destroyed the canvas with color. I felt foolish, talking elliptically in public, when our private talk was this very question of intimacy. Are we intimates of the spirit or intimates of the flesh, and why are we not intimates in all ways of being? There's no perfect answer, until the questions have been forgotten. I've never been able to make of myself a passenger with a designated seat, yet I sat on the bus, trying to find my place, alone or in tandem. There's no reliable past to predict our position, yet in our loving each other, we avoid the very thing we barely seek.

A boy sits with his parents; unaware of the calculations they make to orchestrate his life into the perfect future and the glorified past, he's too busy naming the universe that's just arrived in his eyes. I am with her, in the truest way, when I'm with her as one, or one of two, but when we're something of a third, and the parts lose their designation.

From the Ashes of Refusal

The family doctor, a hero to my parents, gathered us in his office, my young wife's parents, my parents, and myself, to tell us that my wife would have to have a disfiguring operation in order to discover what it was she had. He described seven conditions he thought she might have, six of which were fatal. I slumped down the wall, until I was sitting on the floor. That night, we went to the hospital, where she said she didn't want to be.

I said, "Then, let's go," and she got dressed. On the recommendation of her parents, we went to the Mayo Clinic, where a more experienced surgeon told her what she had and removed it, without the disfigurement our family expert, in matters of life and death, said was inevitable. I don't know what's inevitable, but I'm always glad when someone says, "No! This is not what I want!" and in the aftermath, a beauty is born. There's a phoenix in the ashes of any refusal to do what conspires to multiply misery.

Running Back to Seed

She said her husband, with whom she has been separated, to the point of her buying her own house, had been over. He'd also been walking past where I was, to see if she was with me. She said he's jealous. He thinks there's something between us, and suddenly there was nothing between us. I

wondered what it was that suddenly seemed missing, that had been there, that was never there. This man, with whom she wants to remain friends, is a social romantic, and she's not yet a free romantic, not yet one with an awakened passion for the gardening of the endless moment. I wasn't always such a romantic, either. I protected myself from the display of my spirit, by drinking the elixir of being young, and alcohol on top of that. It did no good, in the long run, and afterwards, I began to write love poems. They were the chronicles of the romance of my existence. This man doesn't see past his romance or her protected self. She hasn't broken the ground, and this gardening with me is uprooting flowers while they're still in the earth. It leaves me with a handful of broken buds and her running back to seed.

The Amber Cube of History

In memory, what occurs is a sense of color in similar scenes, an amber cube of history, the spine of a leaf, an apartment in summer, a rain wet street, the mosquito night, this redundant, emotional coloring. I'm here to see these movies conclude, so no more film is made of the past that blurs the present. When eyes are heavy, there's no relief in their grief. What keeps us apart is the film in our eyes.

I love the romance of the pictures that populate my mind, and I love the reality in the witness of their appearance. These verbal recordings deceive their reality. I misrepresent the truth of my unsaid self, whenever I say whatever I say aloud. The grace of these accounts is not in their color, but the invention of occasion from the emptiness of vision, I don't create from the history of myself, but from the unknown of who I am.

There's no poem but what comes unknown. I love when I can look at others, without thinking of who I've been or who I ought to be, to embrace with open arms and hold with open hands. It takes a grain of sand to make a pearl. The oyster forgets the grain and goes on making the pearl, after the pain of the grain is lost to the pearl.

The Attraction of Sorrow

She stood by the grocery cart with eyes haunted by the absence of who she might be, if she could remember who that was. One can vacate oneself, and what one leaves behind has to carry on, a gentle ghost, she said she liked my art and wondered if she could see more of it. The grandchildren of her best

friend stood nearby, their mother had died, they'd grown used to the spirit, wandering in and out of who they were. Her friend, my old love from last year, called later to say they were tired. She asked about coming, the next day, said she had to go, one of the kids had hurt himself, said she'd call, but didn't.

Time stretches absence to a presence. They say that no one in mourning is ever truly depressed. Stillness welcomes anything lost or unseen. Absence occupies stillness like a specter that spoils the calm, like a toothache, an annoying and persistent noise, an occupier. Stillness is either the presence or the absence of everything, I fall gracefully back into peace, or I chase my thoughts out from the center toward their disintegration. I attach fear to absence. This woman I am with now, in spirit we both say, seems gone, forever, in her going away, when I'm the one who pushes absence to an occupation of eternity.

There's something about absence I love, a presence of absence that hurts. I hold the pain like a lover. If she were truly gone, I could mourn. My invention of love has made me a perpetrator of this abuse, as if love were encouraged by my attraction to sorrow. Absence is absinthe, drugging sobriety with its delusion of another, I look for absence to embrace it, and it goes away, like a ghost in the light. The absence I hold is one way I go away from who I am.

The Crunch Under Foot

Once, years ago, there was a crunch to each step, as I walked across snow in the bitter winter, sounds that leap to their death. To be in a body that doesn't accept its own dying, is to be in a submarine, in an ocean of fear, that I want to steer clear of and can't. The air in the room was stifling, so I stepped outside, because I could. I can change anything, except what I can't, and there's fear in that. I crunch across a frozen field and live on. I continue to desire love, until desire itself begins to crunch underfoot. Things are begun, that may not end as well as we hope, but we begin anyway. Beginnings are fraught with endings. They signal a positive, but the history of our endings infiltrates our beginnings, until every beginning becomes known by an unsought ending. Yet the more I sink into who I am, the warmer the surface becomes. The center I approach, in my deepening surrender, heats me where I am. There's no history at the core, it burns away the surface frost, as long as I don't return to the familiar sound of footsteps on frozen snow.

The Accidental Gift

I read a poem, among other poems, among other poets, at my college's reunion weekend. It wasn't my year for a reunion, so I was something of a stranger. I got choked up during the reading, so suddenly open had I become, to the accidental gift of joy. Later, walking across the grassy commons, I heard a man reciting lines from one of my poems, with stentorian glee, from under a tree, with some of his classmates, and I was made happily whole, in the moment.

At some point, I became vulnerable to simple joy, and ever since, I've been in a search to find a better word for this nameless black hole of the gods. Along with un-naming, naming is the work of a poet. It's a kind of hocus-pocus. I can say surrender is one way to think of it. The embrace of its grace is another way. And then my body acts like a volcano, between blinks.

For What Perfectly Comes

The frantic music in this place is good for the girl cleaning the floor. She said she wanted to run out the door and play in the stormy rain. I need to crawl under the music or give up and let the clatter speak. In the outdoor studio, in the ashram, in India, two young Germans, one a model from the day before, got into a heated discussion while I was painting. I debated the possible responses, from telling them to be quiet, to painting them as they argued, to going into a sort of meditation.

What finally happened was a black-painted canvas with a red vase of yellow-tipped flowers, resting on a slanted table, and an upside-down cross on the vase, either Christian or simply two black lines intersecting. The grace of artful appreciation is accommodating, even in scenes of conflict. I'm wearing shorts on a day that's much colder than predicted. It reminds me of being on the beach in the morning, before the sun has risen. My knees are brushed by a breeze that gets my hand rubbing them, to warm them. Conditions are never perfect for what perfectly comes.

A Speedway Outside of Town

I changed my chair, because the music was loud. It's like changing my shirt, because of the loud music, but what changed was my view. I looked at trees, instead of cars, and the music seemed softer. I pulled the plugs from my ears.

My brother and I drove a Corvette across the country, the same year as Route 66, a TV show about two guys who drove a Corvette, in and out of trouble, across the American landscape. In our cousin's house in Portland, my brother told me that emotions were not part of his vocabulary. I saw the common ground we would never share, until he cried at our mother's funeral. And then he sent a video of himself speaking the sweet, sad story of his broken heart.

Last night, the woman I have wanted to love fell deep within herself and held her own heart in her own overworked hands. There used to be a speedway outside of town, a racetrack, like there is outside nearly every town. The cars go round and round in the dust. There's a beer smell in the air, with rock and roll playing over the loud speakers in the infield, and I look at the trees, without a thought for the miseries of the world.

No Boat on a Sea of Love

I wrote a poem, the last word of which was love. I took that word out of the poem, and it said more without the poor, worn, beaten, empty word, that I use like a popular brand I grew up with. Every time I think love is close, I push it away with demands on its time. Where have you been? Why don't you come more often? I float on a sea of love, wishing I knew how to swim.

In a dream, in the middle of the ocean, in the water, with no boat, and no land in sight, I was alone, adrift. I began to panic. I thought about swimming to shore, but there was no shore, I was too far at sea. Then, it occurred to me that it was effortless to float. I could swim in the sea, I could live in the sea as I was, and fear disappeared, like water into water.

A Part of the Wind

Walking on the coast, my friend began to move, in a way that some might call a dance. He's so keen to be in the physical body, there's no difference between his walking and flight. His way is how an artist speaks the same language we all do, with consequences beyond our expectations. His body is to him what language is to a poet. He listens to see if it will reveal what's on the wing. A bird on the branch is already a part of the wind. He was alone in the trees, along the shore, until he was the same as the branches. And moving with them, he found the language of a wing that became the exhalation of the trees. When I told him this story of who he is, his body

became like a child's, at rest in his favorite chair.

This Tropical Island of the Spirit

The wind is a feature of this valley that the Yakama tribe named for its peace and bounty. Food and game were plentiful, and their hearts were at ease. Middle-aged men wear Hawaiian shirts. I've been to the islands. I wear tee shirts when I'm there, and the natives are inclined to plain-colored dress shirts and hard work. Here on the mainland, I buy brightly colored Aloha shirts and add them to my collection, preparing for the day when I can retire to an island in my body and drape it with the colors of my own tropical spirit. I'm serene in the spirit of wherever I am, but the mind of my body keeps close its memories of cold winters and rabbit meat. This windy valley feels both lush and harsh.

Breathing in Her Presence

None of us, with the exception of the truly insightful, the astrologically divine, or the willfully driven, knows what we're capable of, until some recognition names it. Being in her presence has brought this on me. I'm falling in love with children. They like me, for reasons I have no reason to understand. She and I have begun to see each other for who we are, across the absent gulf of no difference between us. I've been singled out, over a lifetime, for judgment, some bad, some good, but of no use to me, and now I've been told of someone's undying love. It was already true in the eyes of her spirit. We are childlike together. She inclines me to become what I'm capable of. It's a sudden awareness of unlimited beauty in the ordinary. I've always been here, breathing, but breathing in her presence fills my lungs to their capacity.

The Orchestration in Time

The chairs in roadside eateries are designed to be uncomfortable in fifteen minutes. Most popular music is sung and played in less than three. The dramas of mainstream television are done in less than thirty. But the Hundred Years War of our time has no exit strategy. I sat in India, listening to a raga that, after an hour, was still beginning. I realized I was becoming part of it. Time stretched into a neighborhood. I began to stroll its streets and sit on its park benches.

When I was young, I thought about getting married and, after fifty years, learning the truth of it. It's too late for that. I'm collapsing history with someone I'm afraid will leave, as surely as the music comes to an end. Other women I've been with are now old friends I seldom see. I can play a little tune in less time than this takes to read. I can enter eternity, in the short of it or the long of it. I can enter this relationship in the same way this body is like an instance of timeless eternity, or like a pleasant and painful but distracting bag of toys and tools.

Everyone Has An Opening Beauty

When I was young, a young girl and I rolled around in her bed in her parents' house, while they were gone for the weekend. She was a young and plush beauty. Twas ever thus, in the heart of my memory. She invited me to her body, and I turned away from the bliss I had tumbled into. Over the years, I asked myself why I didn't finish what was my desire, until the day, twenty years later, when I drove past one of our unfinished trysts, and I said to myself, as if I was telling someone what I'd always known, "If I'd have fucked her, I'd have married her."

I was shocked by my sudden admission. I had decided, ahead of myself, in secret, that I couldn't dive into waters I wasn't prepared to cross. The barometer of my penis told me the weather ahead. I hated its prognostication, until I was grateful for it. I knew better than I knew. In the intervening years, I became a profligate diver, and it nearly killed me. I learned to hold my breath and cover my wounds with waterproof bandages.

Everyone has an opening beauty. What remains is unknown and unknowable, until it becomes present. My sex betrays its own template. Pleasure, in the flood of the physical, has previously prevented my coming to pleasures I might otherwise encounter. Volume drowns out the poetry. For years, I read poems in the deeply supportive San Francisco poetry scene. It spoiled me. Everyone came to listen. Everyone came to hear the poetry. I discovered a painting of Gauguin's in a museum in Honolulu. I stood still, struck dumb by its startling beauty. I walked back and forth, close and away, until another patron came in that open, tropical room, and I felt caught between masturbation and prayer. If I don't love in a hurry, I see its real beauty.

Reminders of Brilliance

I went to see her, and this time, I moved like a dancer who knows the edge of his brilliance, like a dancer who knows the dream that dances in the audience. She said, "I love it when you visit. Even more, I love seeing you dance down the sidewalk." She bet I couldn't love her insanely on the street, but I could, and I did. I write this down, so I won't forget to do what comes naturally. It's the same impulse as prayer, intended to remind God of the work he said he'd do when he was swallowed by the universe. "I love you," is what I say when I can't remember what love is. "I love you," is what I say when I can.

The Green Man

There's a man in town who walks the streets, carrying a large bundle. He's a young black man, fairly well dressed. He's not homeless. He talks to people who aren't there, but he's aware of other people around him. If you start it, you can engage him in brief conversation. I imagine him as a kind of one-man show, telling what he knows to an indifferent, passing audience. The Green Man, called that because he wore all green, stood across the street from the café on Ninth Avenue in San Francisco. One night, we decided to lure him inside, with the offer of a beer, hoping we might prompt him to reveal his wisdom. Beer in hand, he had nothing to say. He didn't live in the wise nothing of a sage but the dumb nothing of a dispirited, nearly hollow man.

Making my rounds, picking up donation cans for St. Anthony's Dining Room, a prominent city charity, I watched a man on O'Farrell Street have a conversation with no one. He was a ringer for President Kennedy, had he lived; a still-handsome man. He was talking, on the far side of the busy street. People walking by him hesitated, thinking to reply, and then moved on. He smoked an unlit cigarette, tearing off tiny bits of it, until he got down to the filter. Then he tossed that away. It seemed as if he was concerned about his health. I began to admire him. A man offered him a dollar. No beggar, he tore the bill in half and threw it away in the air. The idea of telling off the world has its appeal. To stand in the world with no more concern for acceptance, Black, White, Green, Ex-President, there's tremendous gall in the terminally disengaged. One imagines it a kind of portable nirvana. I imagine it as theatre.

Another time, I turned the corner onto Golden Gate Avenue, in front of St. Boniface Cathedral, on a Tuesday morning, after the state had opened the doors of the mental hospitals, releasing thousands of unlikely and unprepared freedom fighters. A middle-aged woman came toward me, in a pink suit and pillbox hat. As she got within a few feet of me, she opened her mouth and shouted, boldly and clearly, in almost a scream, “ARE... YOU... LISTENING?!!” What if someone who spoke the truth to your innermost reality, existed on the street, one day, and you heard it? What if you were the only one there; talking to no one, talking to yourself, holding half of an unlit cigarette?

This Horizon of Both and Neither

I stop work, painting gutters for a friend, to sit in the quiet, to drink chai and stare at the hills. The first thing I notice is the peaceful appeal of the painting job I’ve left behind. I sigh to remember the garden yard, the solitude, the pleasure of work, but it’s not enough to draw me back. My sense of it is part of what keeps me here, in this place of images and senses. I look at the horizon, the clean line of a ridge without trees, and I feel a certain gratitude for horizons, on land or sea. Horizons are the razor’s edge between in here and out there. They demarcate presence, and entice absence to a dream. She’s gone away for a few days. I’ve been left behind to savor what’s on the other side of this being here. I’m here and there at the horizon of both and neither. No one’s gone away. I’ve gone away from no one. All we’ve made of ourselves is a landscape divided by unbroken halves.

Five Gallons of Beer

In the dream, I was somehow drunk, after twenty-two years sober. I woke up confused, wondering what happened. I couldn’t remember when I’d done the drinking, but in a bar full of familiar faces, I bought five gallons of beer for four dollars and thirty-five cents. It was a baffling price. I carried the bucket halfway home and dumped it in a gutter, with only slight satisfaction. I was done drinking. Again. It meant I was newly sober, with a new birthday. I wondered if it wasn’t a good thing to be new again, with the taste of the old still close. I thought I’d have to add an asterisk by my name. I still wondered what got me drunk, never mind the booze.

I traced the feeling back to the day before, when someone suggested he might publish my work. I became drunk with the idea of success. I became

giddy with the aroma of possibility. I would be a newcomer. Again. I could hardly contain myself, to be seen as someone of accomplishment, beyond what's already true. The dream tells me to keep my old birthday and keep my ambition as an asterisk of my sanity.

Rolling Donuts Down Market Street

I have less trust in the life of the mind than I have in the life of the spirit. It's not surprising, given the generous reality of the spirit. I have an advantage I've never had before. I can see everything that's come along since the full bloom of my innocence. I can see that every word from my mouth has been corrupted into a thought of the mind, or it's set free in the spirit from which it was born. This flowering blossom of a moment, a fragrant inspiration, can easily turn to degradation if I leave it in my lapel too long.

The beauty I see in her spirit bellows my lungs. Its fragrance inspires my desire. But when I make it my belief, I might as well be rolling donuts down Market Street. I thought I'd lose her, or she'd lose me. That's what the mind does with the beauty of the spirit. I leave her, when I think these things. That's what the mind does with the spirit of innocence.

It Was Familiar to My Future

I came across a poem by Galway Kinnell in the New Yorker. It was about burning branches in a contained conflagration. He used words I didn't know. I've been accused of the same thing, of a calculated condescension, but his vocabulary didn't throw me off the scent of his combustion. It added the linguistic equivalent of his half-burned snake to his narrative, the same snake he tempts out of the fire and frees into its grassy apron. The snake is blessed with regenerative characteristics. It's the way we cauterize images with a word, pulled from the fire.

The half-understood sentences are flung into the black night, and they seal themselves as they crawl away. A poet uses words I never heard before, like something for this and something else for that. I like the way poets put words into play. I saw him read, when I was living out the life of the young poet in Cocteau's story of the old poet, Orpheus, and Kinnell was the old master. I liked how the old Orpheus dressed. It was loose and comfortable. It was a manner I hoped was familiar to my future.

The River Is What I Am

When I wake up, I remember my dreams, because I'm still in them. Hours after waking, I can't recall what the dream was. I once felt it necessary to honor everything I ever thought, ever felt, ever did. This is one way memory preserves the past. This is one way the honored past preserves the future. I remember how much I love my dreams, or a particular night, or what happened when I was a child, or who I used to be. But when I went back to the city of my overspent young manhood, I found they'd replaced the city I loved with one nearly identical to it. I can't step in the same river twice. Every time I lift my foot, she's become another person. I can't lose sight of her by getting my feet wet, and the river is where I live. The river is what I am. There is no river. In the reality of being here, there is no river. When I remember no river, I'm still here, in its ever-changing flow.

A Lighthouse on the Shore

In a homemade movie, my mother and father have just been married, and for the first time, knowing the entirety of their past, I see the future of their lives ahead of them. My father is a likeable charmer. He would become the man of his wife's private disappointment, and she will pass it on. In this movie of the past, she can't show him, the man she chose, the man she loved, that she wanted something more of her life. She turned that anticipated despair on her boys. No matter what my brothers and I did, it would end in disappointment. She loved him to the end of her days, without forgiveness, without acknowledging any need for forgiveness.

In his life, my father did what was required of him. There was such an abiding seriousness in his life, that to be serious was a burden to him. He never rose to be what he was capable of being. I imagined him, from hearing him tell his own dreams as a geologist in South America or an actor in Hollywood. He was, for a long time, content to be a likeable fellow, a jokester, a good storyteller, and a decent man. Our mother, his wife, had the capability of her capacities draped on his shoulders, and he refused to carry them into the hills. He stayed on the down slope of their possibilities, not so different from nearly everyone else, but she didn't think so. Her expectations were kept in secret, so secret she never admitted them, until one night, outside a restaurant; she pounded the dashboard of their used Cadillac and blurted out, in a repressed roar, "I DIDN'T GET WHAT I DESERVE!"

Later, she took it back and forgot it. In the years that followed, she would deny it. In the last quiet years of her life, she said, “We were happy, weren’t we? We were a happy family, weren’t we?” And I said, “Yes, we were happy.” It was a glissade on the dispiriting presence of disappointment and the even deeper absence of my father’s rise to what might have been his best. At their wedding, in an old black and white movie, she appears like a lighthouse on the shore of their life ahead. Her beaming beacon is in dutifully surrender to his light, playful, winking, candled accompaniment.

Wealth and Ruin

Every one of us is raised by a complex society of wealth and ruin. If I live long enough, I may get out of this town relatively unscathed. I look at a trio of nubile beauties, and I’m no longer caught in the fantasy of romantic physical imagination; leaving town on a magic carpet ride. A friend, whose father was a colonel in the military, said, “You don’t beat the army by becoming a general, you beat the army by leaving it.” I got an email from a man who disputed Buddha’s recommendation that we let go of lust. He says the absence of desire is being dead to the forces of life.

I replied, “Freedom doesn’t mean having no feelings. It means not holding them in a death grip. It means letting go, so they don’t have power over the moment, so the moment has power in itself. Nothing is lost but the grip that lives past the real.” I especially liked that last line. She’s been gone for several days, and I’ve missed her, several times, of no consequence in the narrowing or opening of my heart. I felt her absence as a moment of feeling her presence. Don’t ask me how. It was a brief enjoyment and not a misery that comes and sits waiting, asking to stay forever, demanding it.

The Hero of Despair

In front of the goal, a player puts his foot out, and the ball goes flying by. He misses the chance to fly with it into glory. He misses the chance to be a cultural highlight for his nation. Some few old athletes are called upon to replay their moments, so we can conjure the taste of sweet victory and ignominious defeat. There’s no shame in becoming the talisman for the best or the worst.

We can be grateful to Billy Buckner, the whipping boy of Red Sox memory, for stepping up to the plate of humiliating defeat, for everyone else’s sake.

Buckner was a great player, whose one mistake made him a symbol. Even though his team had one more game to get it right and failed, he became the hero of everyone's despair.

A World Cup soccer player, at midfield in the match between France and Korea, stands, as if forgetting something, while the play turns away from him. What he's privy to, in that moment, could be his instance of glory. The moment passes without attention or notice, the way almost every moment passes in the life of what we are. If we pay attention to it, we can be one with Bill Buckner, Bobby Thompson, or Jesus on the Cross, if not in the acknowledged glory, then in the equal glory of a moment's stayed reality.

Contemporary Realism

I look across the parking lot at the cars passing on Canyon Road. It reminds me of the painters who have made the everyday landscape seem classic, like Robert Bechtel, whose name reminds me of one of the boys I taught when I was only a few years older than my students were. They were the sons of the wealthy, living at a private school on the California coast. Painters elevate the landscape, despite our wish to keep it low. Even the movies cast an air of the sacrosanct on the familiar. What is a poem, if it isn't another way of restating the real as some sort of truth? Beauty is in the eye of the hurricane, while the debris flies all around us.

I hadn't seen one of my RLS students (The Robert Louis Stevenson School for Boys) for years, when I ran into him. I saw him walking with a beautiful girl in North Beach, San Francisco. I asked him what he'd been up to. He said he'd been charged with murder. He was a quiet kid, tall, smart, and handsome. He'd been in a bar with some Hell's Angels, who he was friends with, when a fight broke out. Someone died, and he was swept up in a blanket indictment. We laughed about it and wished each other well. It was a beautiful sunny day.

Here, the wind is blowing, as it does across the world. The mere mention of the wind commits the language to respect. Even if one tries to show disrespect for the wind, the wind gains in respect. However it's invoked, it's in the nature of the wind to be what it is. There's no way to disrespect the wind. Pier Angeli said her only true love was James Dean, but his need for love was so great, she said, it would have sucked the life out of her. Then, she died of a drug overdose, when she was 39. Her twin, Marisa Pavan, a

quiet, unassuming actor, had a more active career and lived thirty years longer. I want my beautiful actress to call me, to feed me, to love me, to give me the chance to suck the life out of her. This thought makes me feel like a poet vampire, like an artist whose love of the landscape ruins empty expectations, like a car crash on the cinematic highway, like the wind we all fear and respect.

Picasso Was an Asshole

Picasso was an asshole. It's been said before, and I don't doubt it. Picasso was a self-centered, cold, and cruel jerk. Matisse, on the other hand, seems to have been loving and kind, but he may have kept a model as a mistress. Nobody knows what goes on in the confessional of putting paint to canvas. It didn't make Van Gogh any less mad, in the end. Buddha is said to have died of overeating. The statues of him turned his obesity into a virtue. Does what we do liberate our limitations, or are we something unknowable?

I told my son that my father didn't like it when life got serious, that it was a burden to him, and my son said, "Me, too, I'm the same." I told my father I was going to the Writers' Club, and he said, "Don't forget your whip." I'd have liked it more if he openly and explicitly loved me. How many of us crawl over the graves of our fathers, crying for one more moment of nothing funny and nothing serious?

So We Can Drink From Our Hands

I went looking for a book by a poet I once revered. When I found it, I discovered he'd spent most of his adult life as a university professor. It was like finding out that one's admired elder lived at home with his parents. I came within one vote of becoming another of his compatriots on the faculty of fears contained and expectations controlled. I'm two weeks from not being able to pay my rent. I called her, returning her call to me, and found her with her daughter. She dared me to guess what they were doing. I said they were washing out their socks. My first thought was underwear. She said they were trying on clothes, and finally admitted it was underwear. She said she wanted us to meet.

There are no details to a life that explain it. I was told, by a benign café sociopath, that I had the world's largest ego, and I know that if it weren't for the constantly reinforced memory of these accumulated assessments in

writing, I wouldn't have any idea who I am. There would only be the recognition of there being no one here. The only true function of the ego is to keep the body alive by constantly monitoring its vulnerability. Miracles return me to the same self that has nothing to it but wonder in indefinable existence.

I feel the need to take her hand and hold it. I feel the need to take her in my arms and kiss her on the lips and let our bodies begin. She and I have opened ourselves to each other. We've slept in each other's hearts and dreamt in each other's nights. The costumes of our lives are cut from the same cloth. We need to break the chalice of our delicacy, so we can drink from our hands. There's a truck in the parking lot with a ladder fixed to the roof. It's a necessary conveyance, like strapping love to a separation. In the university of the universe, these things strive to make sense of themselves.

The Skin of I

The social hesitation, that one has, in beginning any sentence with the word I, is mitigated when one uses the word "one," but mitigation is the milk that dulls the taste of the espresso. Its bitterness is masked, and so is its pungent perfection. When one has written, long enough, in the voice of I, that I then becomes a character with a voice one has learned, and then I is set free. If this town was empty of everyone else, one could see clearly the movements we make toward and away from each other. It wouldn't reveal more than what we already are, dancers in a dance.

In "The Big Sleep," the story is complicated and short on explanation for the intricacies of its nonsensical plot. The story is a dance. The characters move toward and away from each other; together and apart, shooting, kissing, driving, running, sitting still, living and dying. Bogart and Bacall, Bob Steele and Elisha Cook, Jr., appear in the words of Raymond Chandler and William Faulkner. Seeing the movie for the umpteenth time, I saw the dance of a bit player running into the woods, I saw the dance of a conversation in a car. It was the same, the whole damn movie. My hands look like gators, big and fat, resting in the shade, ready to leap out of their skin. I notice their skin. It is the skin of I, doing its own movie dance.

Her Exquisite Transience

Every morning I wake up from my dreams, partially restored. I once wrote

the same line as “partially destroyed.” That was the way I wanted things, back then, until I’d had enough of destruction, my own and everyone else’s. I used to love the idea that kids thought destroying a sandcastle was as much a part of constructing it, as building it was. One of the lessons in using a computer is the recognition that nothing is sacred. The computer itself can erase it all. You can backspace and lose what just was. You can simply touch “delete.” Science keeps building the reality of transience into our lives. I told my teacher in India I was in love with the “exquisite transience” of this life. He pointed to the words and had one of his assistants say them aloud. He nodded, and then he persisted in returning my attention to the eternal in the moment of present reality. The exquisite transience of this life is my balance within the eternal. It amuses me, when I get in a bother, whenever I think that anything might go away. I save everything I write about this transient reality to disc and then I print it out, as soon as possible.

Stuck on an Elevator with Too Much Beauty

A man went to visit his sister, when on the elevator came a woman of such beauty, he had to cover his face and sink to the floor, saying, “No, no, no, too much beauty.” Two women came in The Little Shamrock late one night, when there were half a dozen other patrons, all men. The two women sat together for half an hour, shared a drink, and talked in private conversation.

The men, by themselves and in pairs, adjusted to the presence of women, until the two left the bar. Then, six men let go of their demeanor. They slumped at their tables and barstools. It had been their responsibility to respond to the presence of women, in a bar, late at night, until the pressure was gone.

The relief in the room was palpable, after the challenge departed, like men relaxing after a traffic accident had just missed them, after a call to military service had gone to others in the draft, after an attraction had been removed from their eyes, like a sudden change in the weather for the better.

Being stuck on an elevator with too much beauty has nothing to do with the duties of men, or the fire in the blood, or the competition for female elk, or the foolish fantasies of lonely drunks. It has to do with a man who fears to look in the face of his own existence, or the face of God, when it reveals too much about himself, as if he might be looking in a mirror without glass.

Marco Polo On His Way Home

Next to nine women, nicely coifed, chatting over coffee, I read poems written by one of those I once looked to, to see how I might behave. Now, I think he sounds academic. I remember writing poems like rants, guttural bursts, mind eruptions, ejaculatory streams, while still wishing for that look of the academic that seemed to guarantee longevity. This poet uses devices to evoke striking images I can't help but admire and dismiss at the same time, because I can see the device. Shortly after I'm tricked, I'm still in admiration. I'm vulnerable to whatever anyone wants to say about what I do. It's an endless circle of criticism, making love to itself, demeaning its ideal, and then embracing that same ideal, after it survives rejection.

She and I had a lovely roundabout, comparing ourselves to ourselves, then and now, finding ourselves wanting, until we were able to love what we had become, and that freed us to love what we had been. I discovered the magic of faith, when I saw that I put my faith in almost everything. Finding everything unworthy of faith, I began to peel off my devotions, one from the other, until I found the black night that sang behind the nightingale, and my true faith appeared.

The ladies get up to leave, and the timber of their discourse leaves with them, revealing the constant background of the hard, tinny sound system, here in this large room with hard walls and a hard ceiling. I imagine Marco Polo, on his way home, with the riches of the Orient in his caravan, still fighting the blowing sand.

Caught in a Gyre

This woman and I have been caught in a gyre, and we're mindful of our spinning together. I want to define it, put a ring on it, build a fence around it, but we defy the physical in the recognition of what has no name. The love of another is beyond the flesh. One wants to careen from flesh to flesh, to make it real, when its reality has no boundary. In my sight, a blue lampshade fits perfectly on a woman's head like a hat. She looks at me, and I see her story of common bondage. By not looking away, I seem to offer some face of liberation, as she drinks her mocha.

When I say she, what she do I invoke, if not every she? When I say I, am I to be confined by the reference to one? I read again the poems of the poet I

rejected. Out from under my rejection, his words shine. When I take her by the shoulders and hold her away from me, I rehearse my embrace. “I don’t exactly say no,” she says. “I say not now, so I can be free to embrace at another time. I need my own embrace,” she says. “I need the embrace I’ve rejected from myself. Let me hold myself a while, until we can come back around to this same meeting, on the spiral of our turning.”

A Short History of the Summer Solstice

Some scene from childhood, another from a different color, I’m in her life, she’s in mine, and we become something new. I’m the secretary of this story, and I’ll never get it right. I’ve made demarcations where none exist. It’s the first problem of Heaven, when the rolls are called up yonder. The enrollment sheets are lost, and the language they’re written in, is lost. Souls are soul. They blend, blur, inter-occur. I sit in a gray chair, and my image fades in and out with hers. Things I say, or might say, are being said or might be said, right now, on the other side of town, somewhere else. When one name is called, sometimes two stand up, sometimes a thousand or more. When you pour one clean human being into another, you get each one, the more distinct for it. The sun is at its apogee, a word like apology. “I’m sorry to be so far away from you,” it says to the equator, a word like “one who equates.” I mean to say... it’s like... the same as being nearest the poles... on the first day of summer.

The Wind Bends Things

Our coming together occurs in moments of utter vulnerability, not in the passion of beautiful bodies. I can hardly bear the sadness of love, as I inch toward surrender, tasting, along the way, the entire fruit, skin and pulp and seed and stem and leaf and earth. The wind bends things as if it wants them broken, then cradles them and caresses them, then bends them as if it wants them broken, until I can see how the wind works, bathing everything in its uncaring embrace, and the sun shines on.

I might wish love weren’t so equally indiscriminate as the elements. I might wish love were something I could buy like a tree in a bundle, but it comes up in me from somewhere I’m not. It comes down on me from somewhere I’m not. It makes me part of everywhere it’s ever been. This sadness must be how I’m kept from my disappearance, in the way everything seems to be, unrelenting, uncaring, and perfect in its place.

She Works in the Garden

She works in the garden, combing the stray strands from its hair. She stands at the sink, cleaning the sour from the sweet. She runs from one side of town to the other, tracing the steps of her feet. She sleeps alone, eliminating extra people from the stillness. Inside the city, she moves from house to house, room to room, opening all the windows and doors, touching the air where she goes, speaking the name of what she wants to know, until the day she stops, outside her house and wonders who lives there, and how they might meet. She goes inside to see. I don't imagine. I can't imagine. It's not my place to imagine. Who lives in her house, the same as she does? Who might it be? Who is given the chance to turn around in place and be new? It's like this morning is to anyone who wakes to it. It's like she is to herself.

In Cool Suspicion

What disturbs me, sits across the room, rarely on the other side of the world. What's might disturb me in the world seems beyond reach, but not beyond reaching. What disturbs me in the world brings the world to where I sit, waiting for the world to come crashing down, like a wall between here and there. I sit in a polite room, rich with decorum and courtesies. I conceal my compulsions behind emotions, then behind behavior, then behind a calm smile. There's no reason to go to battle, just because I see its drama being played out. There's no tribal leader to tell me what to do, except I am he.

I see a man who is watching out. His head turns this way and that. His eyes are clouded, shaded, cowed, covered, consistent in their cool suspicion. He turns his body to contain his possession of a certain air nearest him. He tries to have what's beyond him to have, and then he's had by the trying. This life is about love, and it's not about love. Love already owns everyone. I see a man fighting for his corner of endless love, when there's no actual fight for love, or any part of it. I sit across the room from what disturbs me. I get up and I leave the fight to those who believe there is a fight for love.

Stormy Wonder

Six months in India gave me enough images to last a lifetime. India flooded me so well I remember the flow more than the images. It's the way our talking together comes around me like stormy wonder. I call her to ask a question, the answer to which is another question, like the search for

happiness. She says I sound like a free man when I tell what happened, after we finished our last long swim in our communal river. She reads me something she wrote, and I hear every word she reads. She reads each word, the right word for every word, one after another, each word following the other, until all the words are said. I hear every word. I hear all the words together. I hear what she says.

An AA meeting in India, in the local language, was one of the best meetings I ever attended. The rich, beautiful language spilled over me like my mother tongue. Now she tells me who she is, in her own language. We speak the same language, like the black night in India, with stars, a few bare bulbs on a dark street, an open doorway, a garish wedding, a great beast coming up the road, like a hole in the night and the sudden appearance of an elephant. All we did was talk on the phone, and it was India to my senses.

What Remains

Each of us is bound to be a hole in someone else's life. Some holes evaporate; some seem to envelop the world. Any absence leaves a difficult abstraction behind that no one wants to consider. These absences are like the mathematics of space or the music of emptiness. All we want to know is that Mother still sits in her same chair, or Dad still drives the same car. No one likes to look at the hole they've left behind. It's the same hole we're destined to fill with our own absence. She asked me if I felt urgent about my eventual absence, not in the fear of dying, but in wanting to get things done, before then. I didn't think I was feeling urgent, even though I'm aware I may never get to the islands or the far valleys. It's like every young man's realization that he'll never sleep with all the desirable possibilities.

I'm urgent to look at the abyss I leave behind, because that's where I am, right now. Why would I say that, on this day of delight, in this love we have for each other? What is the link between death and happiness, absence and peace, my dead parents, my aging body, and the joyful freedom I feel? She and I have been trying to love each other with no possession, no form or shape. We're both afraid to lose someone's love. Loss has been a difficult part of our lives. We practice absence in order to discover what sort of love remains when there's no way to prove its presence. It's not possible to make love to everyone that one feels desire for, but it is possible to love everyone that one recognizes.

His Original Self

I pick up another writer's book and break the spine for the juice. I rip pieces out of the paragraphs for meat. I squeeze handfuls of words for a salve. I tear off strips of pages for a bandage. And my bleeding continues. It's the way blood is supposed to bleed, as a talisman of the original. When my son was two, I watched him assume my language, like a bad actor. Within minutes, he was his original self again, with new colors and new texture. I bless his stolen self. It was never mine, to begin with. No one has ever done anything original, and no one has failed to be original. Every good actor wants to be Hamlet. Hardly anyone wants to be Shakespeare. I copy myself into my own peculiar singularity.

Shakespeare wrote one drama, then another, so much like the first, it became unmistakably his. He was never different from himself. He became the man Keats said was the master of negative capability, a man who could disappear in character. No one knows who he was. The more defined my character is, the less present I am in my being. I look down on this body. I see how transparent it is. I'm not an illusion, but my body is merely an allusion to my being. I'm a muscled, hairy reference point, full of blood, in a shape that's dumb to the moment of its own existence.

In Praise of Lorelei

She leaps from the stream like a salmon through my paws. A longhaired blond who needs to guard her instincts, there are too few people ready to catch such fish as hers. She keeps her fish underwater, in the deep pools in the dark, in the fast shallows in the light. The sun glints off her sleek, shiny scales, and a beautiful mermaid swims free, for another day, safe from the predatory claws of clumsy bears. When I first loved her, she could make my words her own. Then I saw she had words for me to hear. She was a mystery masquerading as a mirror, and our roles went into abeyance for another thirty years. Narcissus leans over his reflection, until, beneath the surface, he sees himself in the face of another. He sees, as she sees. From beneath the water he sees the one on the bank, leaning to see who she is.

The Guarding of Eden

I imagine her living in Cleveland, with people I don't know, with whom she's had a long relationship. They have no idea who I am, and if they do,

they're suspicious of me. We talk on the phone, and there's a distance, as if someone's listening. Everyone is in extended relationship with everyone else, and we never get to know the whole story. There is no whole story. There's only story upon story, like ripples on the water, like layers of water. I imagine two young snakes meeting like dancing spaghetti strands. And if they meet past forty, they're boa constrictors with long thick tails. Snakes don't have tails, but they extend themselves into what resembles a tail. It's more like a train, or a tunnel to China. Her extended family in imaginary Ohio stretches around the globe. I see her untangling herself.

I have no illusions about the clean slate of new faces. Meetings have the inevitable Curse of Cassandra. Predictability is the same for everyone. We are all a complex and easy prediction, unless we are able to cut off our own entangled heads. There's no escaping the carefully furnished snake pit of family, friends, and marriages. I don't want to drag my snakes around with me, like a basket full of snakes, like a trailer full of snakes, like an army of snakes, like the thoughts about those I knew before we met. When we're together, we crawl out of ourselves, snakeless in the guarding of Eden.

The Cherry Picker

She told her husband, "If I weren't here, by tomorrow you'd realize how I loved you." He believes she never did. She tells him she loved him, as she leaves him. She tries to stay in a place of love, but she never loved him the way he wanted. She loved him the way she is, the way she loves others, in a way that made him jealous and confused. Hers is a love of spirit, not a binding of lives. She stays when she's gone. She remains, as she leaves what's not inherent. Still she holds him near, to keep her heart from letting go of what it's never owned.

The heart that's not the heart of the mind holds nothing to itself except what's born in the heart and what comes to the heart to be born. We crowd the heart with those who want to call it home. We offer it as a home, when we want to think of it as a home, but it's only a place there for others to pass through on their journey. We hold onto them and they refuse to leave, until letting them go becomes an eviction.

A cherry farmer sits next to me. He sighs to tell me how exhausted he is, working all day in the hot sun, picking and selling his cherries in the sun. How can I not let him sing his woes? How can my heart not be open? It

doesn't know any other way to be. I put down my work and listen to his story, until it's time for him to go, and then I go back to my own harvesting.

Manastash Ridge

Wonders cease, but wonder never dies. Like summer into fall, when I've already seen the frost ahead. Winter buds poke through the snow and defy the odds. Manastash Ridge, in the late day, with folds of shadow, looms like Ayers Rock in the setting sun. The sacred-seeking human spirit makes local earth sacred. The tiredness around my eyes sinks against the bone like sleeping cats.

I see her love like looking at nature and seeing what's true. I have faith in who she is and what she says, but there's another side to this human equation of faith. I have no faith in anything. This loss of parochial faith is the only way I've been able to maintain my faith in everything. She's not different. She's someone I love, who loves me, as slight as gossamer, as solid as nature.

The love we feel will never die. She will, and so will I. There are many ways to die. Death is richly nuanced. The only trust that adheres to life is that it will end; little life, big life, and the rest. We love each other beyond any idea we have about it.

We say it's bigger than we are. When I try to define it to my emotional satisfaction, it's like looking at nature and saying, "God painted it with his divine paintbrush. Isn't it pretty?" We're caught in a force. Our nature is but an example of that force. Look at yourself and keep looking, long after you've forgotten who you are. Look at sacred earth, until you've forgotten what sacred means, until you see what sacred is, before meaning gives it a name.

The Cherry's Sweet Bitter Delight

David, the cherry farmer, comes to me with a small bag of his cherries. I don't know what to expect. I discover they're a pulpy wine I want to hold on my tongue, on a night when I want someone to hold me on their tongue. I walked through the day; on errands from a list I could barely read, holding my head in a vise of fingers, until I was tired of my tools. I dropped them and admitted I'd been holding out, in a drought, for rain. I had let the place

for tears be dry.

I'm alone. I am alone. It is not as sad to be alone, as it saddens me to try to be free of it. My pile of cherry pits attests to the cherry's sweet bitter delight. Breaking the skin of the cherries sets off an alarm in my ears, followed by crushing and chewing, like a man hiking deep in the woods. Wine was once arms around me from the inside, until I finally raised my arms, like wine in the blood, and held myself. I'm alone, and there's no immediate challenge to what I am. I am alone.

The Stopping Point

She drew a line between us, and then hugged the line. She leaned over the line and passed messages across it. We acted as if we were erasing all lines between us. I held out my arms. She commended me for my openness, my courage, and my willingness to lay myself bare. She said it was what she wished for herself. I stepped back and turned, not away, and we drove off, down the same street, calmly, one in front of the other. When it's time to stop, there's a stopping point that only time can tell. The makers of the war we're currently fighting never envisioned an exit strategy. They expected to stay forever. Entrance was their only exit. We fought against the love we both felt, until we declared a lovers' standoff. A line was drawn in the sand that no one dare cross, lest one of us, or both, fly to the other's arms, or fly away.

Another Red Truck

A woman stands with chocolate smeared across her mouth. A man stands by the trees, talking into his hand. The trees are ferny, thick, and drooping. Their green is broken by patterns of green. A long, sleek, red truck slides across the face of the world. I'm overtaken by unhappiness. True happiness is revolutionary, but revolutions subside and are often overthrown. A middle-aged woman is dressed like a frilly young girl. A middle-aged man is dressed like a ten-year-old boy. A passing, laughing couple drops a large tea like a bomb from the sky. It explodes on the tile floor.

My friend has lost his lover, just as his book is being published. It triggers a rippling of the emotional shale of his life back to its origins. "Lucky man," I say. "Too many straws on the camel's back," he says. "Too many straws in the manure," I say. "I don't understand," he says. "It's not meant to be

understood,” I say. There’s no entrance to understanding. There’s only similarity between our misunderstandings. Woe is ours, and happiness too. I heard a preacher say that God loves us all the same, but that he favors some more than the rest. Another red truck slides by, it’s also red, but more like burgundy than the first one. A man walks his dog to pee, and I’m happy, once again, for no apparent reason, and this is the clothing of true happiness.

A Beautiful Monk’s Tale

When something goes well in one’s life, it’s easier to let go of something else. People can be let go of, but rarely the idea of them. Two monks pause at a stream. A beautiful woman needs help crossing, so one of the monks carries her across. He puts her safely down on the other side. The woman and the monks continue on their separate ways. On their path, the second monk questions the first. “We’ve been told to let go of sensual thoughts. How could you carry that woman across the stream?” The other monk answers, “I carried her across the stream and set her down. You’re still carrying her.” I wonder about those women who will not wade and those who will. A beautiful woman waits by the stream for me to carry her across. When I begin, she runs across the water and waits on the other side, to be carried back.

“Velleity” is a lovely word. It means, “showing the lowest volition to do anything,” like having a wish with no energy to carry it out. She and I cross glances like a flinch of a gesture of a wave of hello. She comes close to letting me carry her. Then she wears her monk’s robe. I’m not heartbroken, but the mind of my heart teases me with its wish to be broken. I’m almost heartbroken. How can I live with these moments of being nearly here? Why are there monks walking in the woods? My feet are getting cold. I’m a beautiful woman who wishes to carry herself across the stream. I wish to let myself go. These are the woods of my monastery.

Dressed in Fear

I left the house wearing colors unusual for me; they were the colors of my uncle, the family icon, a man of wealth and power, living on the beach in California. He wore orange, peach, and green. I’m in the habit of wearing plain, dark clothing. The story of my personal life illustrates the transience of all lives. When I was a kid, I wished someone would tell me the secret that grown men and women keep from the young. I’ve become one of those

who are grown. I am one of those who know secrets. I can wear bright colors like rich men who hire others to do their killing. I can stop worrying about what I think of how I appear. One day you wake up, and things have changed. You go to the closet, and you pass by the familiar clothing of who you have been. You've been redecorated. The only truth about secrets that I can tell, after seeing them revealed, is that they expose themselves, if one is paying attention. Our secrets have only their secrecy to wear. They leave their houses, dressed in fear.

We Tie Our Wings to the Trees

What you and I have, I said, we have to be together, to have together. We can know it exists. We can see it. We can cherish it. But we can't have it, unless we're together. Apart, we're connoisseurs of distant wonders, readers of great books of travel, without one step across the threshold. You spoke of the joy that's avoided by those who accept imitations that keep them distracted from the gist, the gut, the gullet, the quick, the depth and the height, and here we are, on the verge of the thing we desire most, and we hold back, mocking our monuments. We anticipate the leap into freedom. We hesitate to make that leap a reality. We hesitate to dirty our feet with heaven. We look back at where we're from, and we tie our wings to the trees.

Awake in Our Sleep

Be awake when you're asleep, sleep when you're awake in this shocking dreamscape. There was a time when she read my poems like lifting fresh-winged birds from the nest, still wet from shedding their shells. Part of the way I wrote them was to look to the spirit in the room. Part of the way was to know she was listening for their coming. There's an awake in our sleep. There's sleep in our being awake. She hasn't gone away, simply because she's gone. For a time, I'll continue to write for her hands on these words. These words talk back and forth in literary time, like the front and back of sleep and awake.

During the time that Robinson Jeffers was being scorned by others, he said he wrote for the eyes of someone in the future who would pick up his poems and take them. When I read that, I jumped and shouted. In the darkest year of my life, I was one for whom he wrote. I was one who read for him. He said that, on the whole, he'd just as soon kill a man as a hawk, and he was a pacifist in the Great War. When I read him, I was thrown out of being a man.

I was thrown into the sky, like a hawk. In the middle of this time, there's a hawk that never sleeps, and when he sleeps, he's awake to someone tracking his flight in their own flight path.

Get Drunk on Baudelaire

The reason she drank wasn't because she was a passionate person who needed to be true to herself. She drank to assuage the absence of a truer passion. Booze didn't increase passion but gave the illusion of expression and control. Drugs gave her and those around her the excuse of her dormant passion. Intoxication and the world's condemnation free the failure of any passion she might have had, in who she was, but her passion stayed quiet. There's a will in true passion that arises in the center and seeks the totality. The will of the truly passionate can be mistaken for lesser passions. A true passionate is often mistaken for a social romantic, a romantic who seems to fall into the desire of love, a romantic who seeks attachments like collections.

There are many imitations of a passionate being, but there aren't many who want to stay in the reality of the truly passionate. The passion to live in the heart of the moment is overshadowed by the struggle for belonging and survival. True passion isn't a passion for activity, risk, danger, or any other of its imitations. True passion is the innocence of wonder, on fire. It is the deep, consistent intention to stay as close as possible to what one has discovered, deep within oneself, where there is no self. A genuine aloneness becomes strength in that passion, not as isolation. Isolation is a fake aloneness. A genuine aloneness comes when she doesn't expect from others what can only be found in her surrender. Those with true passion realize their reality is rare. They get drunk on Baudelaire.

Someone Else's Words

Three preachers, one in his Hawaiian shirt, another in a tee shirt and ball cap, the third with a pot belly in a checkered shirt, take a table and talk, the same as those who get together with their buddies in the same line of work, when their talk might be what could be, between any of us, the inside out of the soul.

I sometimes see myself reverting to my own shoptalk, when it could be the leavening of our common terror, the addressing of our common joy. Sometimes, I fall into a workday mode, no different from talking out the day

with a friend. Grace is not a manner of dress or a chosen profession. It is what remains when everything else is taken away. There's no honor in waiting out this clumsy, naked life. There's no shared pride in being left alone with eternity. I walk through these roses and thorns, until there's nothing left to complain about, nothing left to praise. God is empty of speech, and his words are someone else's. What these preachers call God, what I call the being of life itself, has been inviting me to this sacred, primal humiliation for longer than I've been alive.

Behind the Wheel of Her Automobile

Someone who loves me, someone I could easily call God, has broken my heart. I don't use God's name the same way I don't use hers. There's no point in names. Namelessness is what matters. I can see her moving about town in physical form. I can see a form of God driving her car. The two are interchangeable. It's easier to say she has a form and God doesn't, when the truth is both and neither. The way God breaks my heart and still loves me has taken form in her. She breaks my heart, and still she loves me. She accepts me, and she has nothing to say.

Their silence is full. Their silence is who they are. Their silence is who I am. My heart is always breaking. I live in a constant state of brokenheartedness. There's no single heart to be broken. Nothing, no one, breaks my heart. I don't have a broken heart. And yet I do. It's said that if there was no pain, we couldn't experience joy. And if it weren't for the internal combustion engine, I couldn't see my absent God rolling down Main Street behind the wheel of her automobile.

Her Own Wild Dreamless Dreams

In this afternoon of the soul, after many nights have gone, after many dawns have spread across the days, the setting sun warms the past with its continued presence. I delight in my days, and that delight forgets what came before. Fierce, without doing damage, a witness to what I see, within the luck of my privilege, I come to this stepping off place to begin what still needs beginning. I come to taste my blessings in this place. But I'm not of this place or any place. She's the angel of my better good, but she intends to run me off from her community. If she took me to her side, I'd try to belong where belonging matters most. But she didn't, and I can't.

She sends me out to make love where there are no lovers. She wants my heart broken free of the shell I would wear for her. She sends me out where there are no roads, running the sky with my eyes. These things are true, but thinking them keeps me here, until I begin to imagine her own wild, dreamless dreams. My sense of what's true turns to wonder, and I'm back on the road again, running my days toward the night that finishes at dawn.

In Pain of Thought

I'm not the victim of my desires, even when I'm the sensor of my sensations. Today, when I was in pain of thought, I said, each time, "I love you," and then I said her name. It's a relief to remember love, even when the occasion for it has receded. I'm at peace, in the way of real peace, that has no way. There's forgiveness in simple things, past thought. There's forgiveness in this way beyond my ability to court or invent ways. I can love, even now, in the absence of love's residency.

The Siren of my Silent Heart

I lived in a small apartment below the street in the city, but the back of the building was high above a small, enclosed yard. One day, outside my window, I saw below me a naked, dark-haired, large-breasted, long-legged beautiful woman, lying on a green bank in a quiet corner. I hid behind the side of the window and stole sight of her. I knew who she was. I'd seen her visiting another woman in the building. I wondered how we could be introduced. But we never were. I had no way to approach the emblem of my desires in the daytime. She came back to me after I read Stanly Kunitz say that our poems are, at best, an echo of a song, heard once or twice in a lifetime. I asked what that song was for me. I saw the image of my silent siren in the summer yard. She was there in those few days when nudity was allowed, until it wasn't, and then she was gone.

Was she one of those two images that govern an imagination? It's true that her song was silent, as I was silent; in a room that glowed so bright I was sure she'd see me at my window. I stood in hiding, guarding my flame to keep it from being seen. She burned me with the fire she helped me discover in myself. Images beyond me have had the power to touch what's true within me. I don't stop them. I willingly apologize to whomever I call my catalyst. I didn't want to take anything from her. Her presence was a gift. I almost ran down to tell her how grateful I was. But I couldn't give my sense

an accurate name. Not then, but now I know an overwhelming wonder, the truest reality, that's tricked out of me by an image of sensual desire. Once it was out, I knew it. I know it, I seek it, I welcome it, in whatever form it takes, in whoever's shape it comes. I could have praised her, or chased her, or coveted her, but she was already, in my experience, the siren of my silent heart.

The Auras of Ruin

I walked beside myself, half in, half out of my body, with my arms swimming the air. When I attempted to be succinct, my ideas spilled out of me like children at recess. I looked like someone uncertain, standing in a cloudy room. Feeling bad about a relationship that had never really begun, I found a room like a cave where I could feel what I said I was feeling. Before then, I was angry, wanting to attack the sadness I felt. I wandered around in place, not knowing what more to say. I read a poem about wonder that needs to find a face. I thought there was no honest way to tell what stumbles into the heart and can't find its way out, but I did, trying to tell the truth, when I couldn't find a way to tell it, without telling it wrong. I take a picture of an empty room, and then I forget about rooms and photography.

Unremembered For As Long As It Takes

When things are happening that disturb the peace, I come to a place, between the last thought of things that have happened, and the next thought of things that might happen, to a place where nothing is happening, the place of nothing, and at its deepest root, is the place of everything. I would trade this awareness for its reality in a relationship. I would trade this awareness for the moment of not being alone, and still alive in this aloneness. I have sought the moment of not being separate, in her company, in the shared awareness of our base aloneness. Imitations of that nirvana have become the common pattern in our lives.

In the attempt to accept our nature, mine with her and hers with me, we lied about the possibility. We lied that we could be free while staying apart. There's no way to live in freedom and build it a home. This freedom can't be done, as long as there's a doer and a thing being done. No poem can be written, unless the poet is willing to empty himself, so everything is unremembered, for as long as it takes. Being in this business means being in the building of no building, with the finest tools, for as long as we live.

We try to be alone in our conjoined aloneness. We try not to be a couple in our airy coupling. But we are the makers of a greater thing that demands not to be made. We would be true poets, in the big toss-over of ourselves for a bigger self, but we cling to the carpentry in the flood of our becoming who we are. We cling to ourselves in the freedom of letting go of ourselves and in the demise of who we have come to be.

A Tiny Dawn Rising

I miss what I've never known, a certain reality I want to call tender, a way of being I want to call cherishing, a brave vulnerability I want to call loving, beyond what I call being in love. And, I want to give up the ghost of my sanctity and trust another with a likewise lethal love. If I love, in the way that threatens me, I fear I'll be killed by love, but the experience of love doesn't kill, even if the one I love doesn't love me, and if she does, I can't feign my dramatic death, but live on, past what I was, before

I feared I had loved too well or not at all. I've loved before and lost in love, and I've been found in the loss. I wonder if I might be found in what remains after loss itself has been lost for good. We talk like ascetic saints, caring companions, incipient lovers. We pretend we're not in love, when there's no other word for it. We tell each other how afraid we are of where we gracefully go. There's a tiny dawn rising on the backside of this morning, its light is pregnant with endless summer, and it's too late to say I still love the darkness.

Telling the Truth of Lions

She's a biker broad with the heart of an artist. She wants to tender her resignation from the practice of disguises. We sit across from each other, peeling the skin of our illusions. Underneath everything, is peace. Under sadness, under fear, under terror. We come together at great risk to our survival as separate beings, but our separate survival is guaranteed by what we do with each other. We dance in our chairs. We sing in our apologies. We heal our hearts at a distance, the way light heals from a distance we call the sun.

I can see her heart beating in her ribs, pumping like a lion, at rest, with a passion for her being a lion. Her steady breath fills her chest. A lion might never think about being a lion, but what else can it be? She's a lion among

lions. All the animals greet her with their lionizing. Even the grass she lies on is proud. I practice this praise, because it does my heart good to tell the truth of lions. I take liberties with the truth by telling it.

Not Some Wall in Italy

She called me after a week with no hope of our being together. I said, “It’s going to be hard for me to bullshit this up.” She laughed and said, “This is not some obscure writing about some wall in Italy.” Bob Dylan was a bright and talented boy who went to New York and came back to Minnesota, changed. Then he went back to New York and changed again. He became a channel for beauty and pain. He was ready, and he was capable, as many are, but then, to him, something happened.

No one could ignore him. They accepted him, and they adored him. Then they scorned and derided him. They tried to dismiss him. He was as amazed by the scorn and derision as he’d been by the brilliant moment he’d been capable of creating, in the brilliant moment that created him. This thing between us, that we have no way of understanding, has drawn us together and kept us apart. In the middle of it, I wanted her to name herself in my vocabulary, like wanting God to show up in long hair and sandals and get himself killed, but these divine glimpses between us are better than a dogma based on a myth of failed love.

In the Glare of Our Astonishment

We’ve been loving each other in the glare of our astonishment, with no respite from the brilliant focus of how we are with each other. There’s respite in who we could be with each other, but we don’t allow ourselves to sit in the shade of our fulfillment. Instead, we use time apart to buffer the blows of unrelenting wonder. We’re afraid love would be exhausted by its constant presence, that too much beauty, too much happiness, would ruin us. Enlightenment comes when one admits that one is no longer un-enlightened. I make the case for love, yet I fear it won’t survive its own truth. There’s wonder we’re afraid to lose, in the brilliant practice of its presence.

A Certain Kiss

Cloudy with relationship, I thought, like the rumble of quiet thunder, “All

she wants from me is for me to be who I am. All she wants for herself is to be who she is.” And the clouds were abruptly gone. I was a man at ease in himself, with no idea beyond myself. I told my partner in astronomy this bit of enormity. It was the sighting of a new planet to which we’d been giving each other the same coordinates. We calmly rejoiced, like scientists in love with infinity and its infinite fill. I held her by the arms, and I kissed her. It was a certain kind of kiss, a constellation in my heart. It was a kiss to love, with nothing overriding love itself.

When we aren’t locating the heart of the heaven, I desire her. Seeking a shortcut to Nirvana, I want to be with her as I’ve been with others before. I want to be with her in the familiar joys of the body. I want a pleasant and effective entry to genuine intimacy, or so I think. My hollow sincerity hides this brilliant new orb from my sight. A certain kiss has been a constant in my life. I thought it was something given or taken. It is, instead, the moment of my ascent to never coming back to this earth of measured distances.

The Dance of Her Days

As the light falls across her, she reveals herself in the dance of her days. Still herself, she becomes part of another, when she sees herself whole, in the presence of someone who sees who she is. No portrait can show the true nature of who we are. We reveal ourselves in a deeper way that’s lost to the picture. She tells herself beyond her composition. It’s her practice to be who she is. She can’t say what she’ll be at the end of the day. She forms herself with no idea of the eventual art. Approach an artist in the making of his art, begin to comment on it, and you describe the painting that may never last, that may never exist. You pull the baby out of the womb. You make finished furniture of a pile of wood and nails. You make a final love of loving, as I have done, eagerly, and too soon. I pull away from my insistent desire to love. I hold myself apart, at this coming of her going.

The Leviathan

She was listening to someone, and as I watched, thinking of nothing, I felt the compassion caught in the net of the kindness she cast near and far. I enact my movement as a physical man, not as a thing to be seen from the outside, but as something I see from the inside. My body is an environment of awareness; everything about my body is within it. I’m within this awareness, as we are now within this poem. When Imaginary Jesus came

down from the hills, an allusion to his enlightenment, he played dice with the boys, and he kidded with the Marys, he turned wine to water, until he was reminded of his passion, it was an embarrassing lapse that no one forgot, and when he died, almost everyone stayed away.

I have no enduring grasp of the eternal, it has me, I enter it, the way she entered me, there's no escape, she convinced me of her presence, as I am of my own, I can't leave this, even upside down, it's my ground. I look at the beauties of the world, and the heavenly ones, as well, and my eyes remain in my head. She isn't being kind; it is the kindness of her being I see. I see beauty in my sight, and insight tells me to take it in, when it's already taken me, from the inside. Breathe, breathe, I say, the leviathan needs the wind.

This Kind of Being Home

Four highway patrolmen sit in my sight. I look past them. Then I see the camaraderie in their soft eyes, in their ready laughter, in their easy posture. How can this be, among people with guns and the duties of power? Most of us find our personal tribe outside the tribes we're expected to honor. In the peculiar responsibility that we have to know ourselves, we look among certain others and see ourselves reflected. We recognize kinship outside the kin in which we're raised to belong. In our belonging, we will die for the other, in the sense of there being no other between us. The love, of one who is not separate, opens the accepted presence of death.

It's a thought we otherwise ignore, until, finally, death becomes welcome to our peace, and a measure of our happiness. We find ourselves with another self, not similar or merely familiar, but identical, in the way identity is borderless in love. There's nothing to be done with what can't be separated out. Teenagers in love pretend this love. So do armies and anyone else who's frightened of strangers. We desire the kind of surrender that never comes home again. True surrender is where separation and loss are imposters in the house.

Crossing Midnight

We talked for a couple of hours crossing midnight, and then I slept. I dreamt her last lover was at the back window. He was angry. He smashed the window. He smashed the frame of the window. He saw I was with her. I said it was an inauspicious way to begin a conversation. He sat on the bed I was

sitting on. He said he was trying to understand what was happening. He said it was a matter of coming to understand. I thought he was making sense. I thought he was sincere.

For twenty years, she's lived in the same town where I'm a newcomer. For most of that time, she's lived in partnership with another man. I'm not part of that tentacled reality. Her history of relationship continues to include countless others. I've never been one so inclined. I'm outside this interwoven tapestry of lives. I have tools that pull the thread from the cloth. I can't do that to her or to myself anymore. There are those who open to the moment, so the moment opens to include everything that is. There are those who live for today, making the moment a piece of parceled time. We can't be defined by where we are, but where we are can define itself in who we are.

Escaping Gravity

In overlapping realities, in this place where I live, something of the spirit pulls me up and out of the profane; something of the familiar pulls me down and into the mundane. A local band played in the market, the singer sang of a woman he saw on the street, a magical figure, a woman of his transformation, beyond the life of the town. It was oddly disconcerting to hear a local woman described in such poetic language, to be caught between transfiguration and the gravity of society. What weighs me down is not cruel or evil, but slowly tightening wires on a tree, and the tree doesn't know it's become a decorative grotesquerie.

Back from the India of my keenest awareness, I assumed I could live as I had in that nurturing crucible, here in this land of social restraints, but I watched, as my joy became a smile, then a protected glance. There is such gravity in our belonging to each other; we risk losing what's ours to give. Gravity's embrace holds me to its bosom, but even Icarus came from somewhere. His dream of flight lifted him above his place, but the story warns of his fall, the singer ended his song with the sop that the sight of his muse was but a passing dream.

Summer Elk

I accept any reality that doesn't want to change, so I can accept the deeper reality that never changes. The backside of the hills that surround this valley

are smooth like the hide of summer elk. The setting sun washes out the color against the skyline. She and I seem to want to keep the conversation going. I was a penitent at the foot of the one I desired, seeking the acceptance of my plea. Then, one day, in the night, I spoke the simplest of words, and I let go of my sacrifice. The sky is often not nearly as lovely as we give it credit. Its ankles are deep in the dust of our self-congratulations.

When her daughter began to back away from the future of her new life, she rose up. She saw herself standing in front of herself. She told her child to love what she loved and give up the patterns of expectation and defeat. She heard herself talking to herself. What I said to her, in the night, was what I'd been saying, before then, but I said it in her presence, instead of at a certain distance, in lovelier language.

She was worried that I'd been hurt, but there's no hurt in saying those things that come with hurtful packaging. The package is discarded for the content. There's no guarantee for us. We live an indestructible presence that keeps multiplying itself, in place of itself. The sky has no limit, but it changes. I said I wanted to love her. I said it for myself. I stopped waiting for the moment of her hearing me.

Arctic Palm

The Empty Hedonism of Distance

Her presence, lying on the couch like a naked Maja, was difficult to accept, without any sign beyond the sweetly spiritual and the gentle slight of her appreciation and admiration. She was laid up with unexplained pain in her legs. Her body glistened in the stifling summer heat, as she became loud with distance making, the way children instinctively know how to scream to ward off attackers they can't protect themselves from. She told me of a man who tried to entice her to him, how she held her ground and became part of a life that wasn't part of his.

Finally, I couldn't continue to entice her. I was finished. I said I didn't care anymore, to be living in the intoxicating imbalance. Like letting go of water falling, I let go of a good thing, because the poem demands it. The poem won't be made less of, by being only good enough. There's something right, in speaking my life to a sense of who I am. I can be the author of life. I can be a poet to an unseen poetry. I can believe myself and tell myself aloud.

The Road Goes On

At the end of the road, the road goes on. Here I am, doing this. One can believe in God and no such thing. One can believe in time and timelessness. One can believe in oneself and the emptiness of self. I'm in the city, at a table with two young women who are engaged in the complicated acceptance of the fullness they are living inside. This spiritual physicality is the definition of being human. We are intelligent animals whose dreams are busy with life. There's an inherent surrealism in simple humanity.

Here I am, carrying a ladder to a backyard, wearing the wrong boots on a hot soccer field, taking my book to the printer, visiting with friends, eating dinner alone, and I overhear a discussion of the imagination of the eternal. These young women talk about addiction and Eastern spirituality. One of them is an attractive mind at work; the other is a softly sculpted beauty at peace in the wisdom of her natural gifts. When an iconic bird spoke to her when she was in Japan, she listened. I'm tired from a long day of endings and beginnings. When we are held in each other's arms, ending and beginning lose their distinction.

An Empty Setting

Back home, a gravel-voiced woman from Philadelphia wants to know if they sell sandwiches here, in this coffee café by the freeway. They don't. She condemns the air with a small fist. A self-centered determination accompanies those on their cross-country run on the great conveyor belt between here and there. I'm feeling desolate abandonment, as I live past the desire to engage her. I would've liked her to join me on the journey, but she hasn't finished her work at home, and her love for me didn't reach critical mass. I'm no more, no less alone, than I was before.

I risk an inward spiral, but that's not a limitation. I'm inclined to engage the inward with the outward. The thought of her was part of that engagement. Spirals are like open circles. The sun hangs beneath a bank of clouds on the horizon, like a light bulb through a white lampshade. The wind whips the tolerant trees. A man runs across the asphalt highway with more thought to dinner than fear. I've reached a place that ought to give me solace but doesn't. Solace is the requiem for those who imagine goals. For one without stated goals, every arrival is simply another state of being here.

Two Hands in the Dark

Poetic broken-heartedness, a characteristic I became known for, has no precedence in what I'm feeling, sitting on a hard chair, in the glare of the setting sun. Last night, I went to be in a room with her, but I left soon after arriving. In such rooms, by the nature of the gathering, I habitually expose myself to fear and the heart's naked beauty, but I ran from the idea of my attachment. I thought, "It's hard being in love." It's not a thought familiar to my thinking. I wondered what I meant. I wondered if I wasn't apologizing for my attachment.

I hadn't seen her, since I left the imagination of what we might have been together behind. I can feel how great a hold it's had on me. I was attached to the idea, even when I thought of her as a friend. I continued to think of her as a desired lover, despite that it had no shape in her future. I couldn't exorcism my attachment when I saw her. Instead, I chose the night for my shaking heart. I can run to my soul in the dark night, alone, I can run with the wild horses of my emotional heart, but I'm not ready to do either among those who aren't present in the way these things need to be open. Imagine a roomful of healthy people who are willing to do these things, willing to look

within the living moment to embrace what it is that lives there.

There are jewels of truth beneath the sand. Stirring the sand can be a whirlwind of eye-stinging danger, or it can be the revealing of a gem. I don't think love is a big thing, anymore. I think love is a tiny thing, a small thing, like two hands together in the dark. The union of our lives lies deep within that miniscule, muscular meeting. Life is not big; it's miniscule. Life is the shortest amount of time, in the smallest amount of space. It's where everything is. It's where we can all be found, alone, among others.

Disguised by Love

I can't be her friend or her lover, and when that's true, I might be her friend. I can't slowly disengage from the idea of her as a lover, as if backing up slowly will reverse time, as if we'll reappear at the beginning, where nothing was defined. I can't live in the house of my friend, after I've slept in her bed, even if neither of us was there at the time. I don't know what this separation will be like for her. She imagined me as her deep and lasting friend, as she encouraged my passionate display.

She was my one concentrated attention, but it wasn't a one-way street, even if she only drove slowly, sometimes in the same direction, sometimes quickly away. Unlike the other times we danced apart, this divorce needs to be completed. There's no other way for me to love her. I can't stay married to an idea, even when it's disguised as love, not even when it's disguised by love itself.

Some realities are muddled by the presence of their imitations. Taking a position confuses some. Some realities are a mixture of contradictions, tossed in a pot, along with perfect clarity. Working on a painting, many years ago, I painted over a small patch of crimson, and the painting died. I knew what I'd done. I knew what was there before I changed it. I put the crimson back where it had been. It was a deft touch, but the painting never came back to life. Sometimes, the opposite is true, and a painting will resist any willful misdirection and refuse to die. There's no telling the ways of the immune and the immutable.

The Fickle Wind

Now, as I write, I seldom look up, where once, I'd look up and out, in a

search for what wasn't already within my reach. One might think I've lost something, but there's loss in every gain. In a moment of keen attention, anything that might matter will come to one's attention. I don't have to cast my attention wide. My attention is honed. I don't have to throw it about. Animals sleep, not with one eye open, but with their attention tuned to their reality, awake or asleep. They sleep when they are awake and they are awake when they sleep. And, even in their acute attention to life, animals die. The fickle wind blows every which way.

Chasing Truth and Beauty

I found my source in the course of seeking the love of a woman. I wrote books of love poems and put them in an anthology. I said the love that energized me was finally defined by the source within, not by the woman I might love. Can one find God in the love of Jesus? Can one forget not only Jesus but God as well, in the search for the nature of love itself? I have found myself concentrated in the desire for the love of a woman. Keats wrote about love and beauty in the face of a Grecian urn. No one mistook him for an antiquarian or a potter.

I desired to love her for who she was. I desired to love her, because of how we were together. I desired to love her because she loved me. I desired to love her because she loved me for the way I loved her. I desired to love her for the way I loved her. I wanted to take her home with me, but museums don't allow the taking home of treasured urns. I want out of this museum. I desired to be inside the love that dies and can't be immortalized. I desired to be a mortal man, in love with a mortal woman, my eyes racing toward her and away from the source. This is a kind of theft of what can't be stolen. The addicted gambler desires to lose as much as to win. He knows his winnings are not the source of his desire. Finally, he seeks the source of his desire and not its proceeds.

The Temporal Savior of my Eternity

My desired love has gone out of expectation. I'm left with albums of fading mental memories. She was the temporal savior of my eternity, and would be, if I let imagination play itself out, without interruption. In the loss of my religious fervor, I find myself in a garden without the threat of crucifixion. I thought we could make music together, but this stillness plays better between us. When my father died, my son said it was easier to love him; his

personality wasn't in the way. Peace descends on relationships when the reality of love becomes clear. With nothing in the way of love itself, I love, and still I seem to believe in these prison walls, the more free I am, the more I seek my imprisonment. The more I seek the imprisonment that claims me, the more I seek to be free of what I claim. When I see what I claim as mine, I see what I once thought claimed me. I find myself in the freedom I find, when she is no longer mine to mind.

Gray Days

The gray air enshrouds everyone who walks in it. All are encloaked in a mantle of gray. Each one is misted with gray, backgrounded, enclouded, clothed in air, encumbered by a diaphanous display. My mood has lifted. Circumstance conspires to lighten my burden of personal angst by replacing my burden with good fortune and good will. I'm set free of my concerns, until another change in the weather occurs. Thomas Hardy said the sun mocks mankind, denying mankind's overcast of sorrow and defeat. I'm uplifted by gray. I'm uplifted by sunny days, as well. This sort of uplifting will take the weather as it comes and transform it to become the perfect foil for whatever happens.

A man on the beach in Honolulu, many years ago, said I was the most agitated man he'd ever met. The sun reflects our unbearable burden of scorching distress and dismay. Every example of thought and feeling lives within this microcosm of one. I'm avoiding some distress and dismay, right now, in a facile and facetious display of verbal acuity. I can write about love and loss, but shame, disappointment and anger are less accessible to the spirit that drives me. I have a way of transforming love and heartbreak. I'm less able to commit myself to the passing weather of human misery.

I Am My Own Ground

In the throes of overwhelming circumstance, with the spirit of a contemplative, I surrender. In neither happiness nor misery, I resort to my original reality. When I'm unwilling to be in the peace of my spirit, I step outside its entrance and make it an exit. I become Emily Dickinson wanting to join Walt Whitman on the battlefield. I become Walt calling on Emily, to see if he can rest in her parlor. I've sought to be with women, wanting to make them my land, my earth, my ground. Why would I want to be with women whose enduring quality seems primarily to be that they are women?

Because, with them, I found a ground, beneath my surrender, to being itself.

My mother died, and I began looking for a woman to be my new ground. That thick-legged, rejecting woman was my ground. She was the earth I came from. When she passed, I became homeless in my homelessness. I had been at home in the homelessness I felt with her. She told me I needed a woman, but I rejected her advice for as long as she was alive. I was indifferent, and then I wasn't. Finally, I lay down on the earth, not the ground, not the grass, not the yard, not the paved road. The earth bore me. The earth is my Mother. I stand on the earth in Amherst and Brooklyn. I am Emily, I am Walt, I am my own mother, I am my own ground. I am my father.

The Wind in the Trees

The wind in the trees is Russian, blowing across the Steppes, like rain incessant on grasses, insistent, like repetitive, unyielding thought. I lay in the dark night thinking, until I open my eyes from behind their lids and look at nothing. I take long easy breaths. The first thought that comes is a recognition that thought constricts my breathing, until it becomes shallow, tentative, hesitant. Unattached to thought, my breathing assumes its nature. I become clear about the abuse I allow in the search for peace. I wonder if peace, with any other, isn't just a dream of an impossibility.

I close my eyes, I see peace, and my lungs open like the wind. I look at the dark behind my lids and see light. I think, don't look at the windows, it spoils the dark, but there is light in my curtained eyes, with no thought and no windows, I invent light from the wind and nothing. To be with another is the beginning of thought. The moment eternity thought of man, it entered the world of thought. Seeking forgiveness, all eternity can say is, "Close your eyes and don't think of how I'm everything and nothing to you, and breathe, like the wind."

One Bowl Full

There's a deep well I've been pouring water into, like a small boy's wish to make the ocean happy, dumping buckets back into the sea, running back and forth to the shore from his sandcastle. I stop digging, running, pouring, long enough to see the sea that was here before I began to help, and I see that the sea doesn't need my help. I see that the sea is the help I need. I found one of

my favorite cereals on sale. Every evening, I have a bowl of cereal. I love the cold, sweet milk that remains after the cereal is gone. I add more cereal to prolong the pleasure, but the pleasure is best when I have only one bowlful. The comedian says, "You can't save time. You won't be told, at the end of your life, "You have time saved up. You can live longer." I can save myself from the losses that plague, when I see that everything returns to itself. Life is a bucket in a cup in a spoon in a drop in the ocean. Life is the ocean.

In Beauty's Bedroom

I drove through a canyon, near a river, alongside railroad tracks. Rocky cliffs banked the valley, like a scene from a movie. The movies have prepared us to witness nature's beauty and man's beauty. In exchange for being taken care of by men, in a hundred ways, if she wants it, all she has to do is accept their attentions with good graces. I saw another beautiful woman at a party ask if she could help the host. He answered, "You just stand there. That's all you need to do." Her expectation was trained for her to look good and be appreciated.

The valley I drive through couldn't care less how I look at it. Its soul is intact. The Grand Canyon doesn't care that tourists gawk or that postcards are made of its beauty. Nothing done in its name offends its integrity. It offends me that I associate beauty's lesser selves with beauty itself. It offends me that I accept lesser beauty as emblematic of my heart. It offends me, when I sit in the theatre of my imagination and believe I'm living in beauty's bedroom.

Like Seed Shit from Birds

There are poets who push language to musical notation and unpredictable association. In my old age, like some painters in their art, I may etch the briefest of notes in bright colors that hang apart from meaning, like birds that drop out of the sky at random and turn into berry patches and brilliant blossoms. One day, I won't have anything to say, and my poetry will be nothing more than the occasion of words taking root like seed shit from birds.

The Captain of the Wind

The sun burns through the haze. It's a glowing ember in ashes. As long as I

stay away from her, it's difficult to gauge the pain of my hurt. As much as I'd like to name her the Scylla and Charybdis of my wreckage, my seamanship is more likely the culprit. I sailed toward her rock and whirlpool. She didn't reach out to me to cause this calamity. I'm the captain of my ship, even if I'm not the captain of the wind. Then I say the wind is to blame. The wind is what brings any partners of purgation into proximity. I crawled off the rocks and broke free of the swirling waters. I'm back on course, sailing with the wind, in the direction of its unpredictable wisdom.

I say I'm the victim of the wind, and I praise it, in the next breath. Some god must be made responsible for what happens, or else we're left with our own terrifying responsibility. Some god must be given the blame and the credit, or we'd have to admit our eagerness to shipwreck. Some god must assume the shape of opportunity, or we'd have to re-invent our foundering self. I find provision in this deprivation. If I hadn't met the shore so painfully, so perfectly, how else would I know I'm better off when I'm under sail? I'm on course with a gentle wind, but the collision calls me back. Still, something pulls me on. Something that knows my navigation has divinity in its accident. Some wild wind captains my voyage.

The Constant Indifference of Wonder

The light glints and glares off cars, like stars bright in the daylight. A sun in a silver Mercedes, half a dozen stars in a gray Chrysler, the night sky in a blue Ford, beyond that, a Milky Way of reflected light. Small galaxies glide by on the arterial, shooting stars on the freeway. The expectation of wonder has gone out of my love of the other. Wonder is the black night sky, lightless behind the eyes, not the reflected blur of light. I bring myself to wonder, I am the sun of my expectation. The sun in the parking lot is the same as the one in the sky, the same as the one in my eyes, undirected, its light never moves. I am the field where light thrives in the constant indifference of wonder.

The Commotion of Intangible Love

In the surrender to any god, there's a bliss that fades to what's ordinarily real. In spite of my love for the muse, in any form she takes, I love what doesn't come and go, what never fades, is always here, what's always true, and then the objects of attention, the icons of my passion, fade from bliss.

A western priest told his Advaita teacher, after twenty years, “I can’t give up my belief. I know everything you say is true, but I’m still in love with the form of my faith. I can’t surrender, enough, to let it go,” and his teacher said, “Be as you are.” My teacher, who led others in the practice of faith without form, cried when he spoke of the god of his faith; he couldn’t forget the love of his god, whose image came and went, when love itself was lasting.

Being in the spirit of a man’s body, my heart’s in league with my flesh, and my heart’s bound to its eternity. There’s no way past this parted faith, this loss, this enduring disillusion that we all experience in so many ways. Eternity is time without beginning or end, but there are beginnings and endings in life. Falling back into stillness is the calm of my being where there’s no commotion of intangible love.

The Dancing Girls of the Buddha

I never had as personal a god as my love for women. I was taught to run through the apostles to get to Jesus, through Jesus to get to God, through God to get to what is. Shopping among gods and people, for a way to know what love is, has been my personal failure. Love in the presence of a woman became the face of my essential love, but I want to see love more clearly. I want to see love pouring out of me toward love itself.

I was warned of Buddha’s dreams of dancing girls, that came to him even after his enlightenment, I dismissed the warning and sought a woman, as if she were the heart of my inspiration, until I didn’t feel any familiar burst of freedom, or the willingness to look for another lover. I sought to see spirit in being, to embrace my naked self as the incarnation of my spirit. I grappled with thoughts of sensual desire. When I saw spirit in a woman, I sought to embrace her with the same joy as I embraced my eternity. Face to face with the spirit of my being, I want to hold it and it to hold me. Love was the only worship that fit my flesh that matched the degree of my passion, until the dancing girls are gone from my still beloved dreams.

A Scenic Reality

I took pictures of the house and shed I’ve begun painting. I printed the picture of the shed. It looked like one of those rustic scenes that people hang on their walls to remind them of a better time, when things were simpler, a slanted blue door, surrounded by vines. I wore myself out, sanding the old

paint. I thought I'd be able to paint longer than I did. I drove home on the freeway, when the back road is more scenic and tranquil. I paint a house in a quaint town, off the beaten path, but money has worn a path to its door. They filmed a TV show in town. There's new construction beginning to make its mark in homes for those at leisure. The town has become a tourist center in the woods.

The woman I'm painting for lives in the city. She tells me her daughter, an artist in New York City, has to work in a camera store to survive. I should be dead by now, if I was ever going to make a name for myself as an artist. Or else, I should be living in the declining years of my influence. Instead, I'm painting a lovely, simple, now quaint, house, and I'm about to begin teaching at the local university. It's a job I could've started, a long time ago. Once again, I'm beginning, when I should be finishing.

In the heart of what matters, I'm beginning to see if everything I've believed and professed, is true. I'm discovering whether or not I've only been speaking in anticipation of my realized glory. In my dedication to simple truths, in trusting who I am, was I only making a wise investment in a predictable future? Did I mean what I meant, or did I mean it for show, in the self-serving belief in my own destiny?

The Ruling Classes of the Soul

A man handed me a copy of a deep thought and said I could keep it. It was a discourse on the futility of yesterday and tomorrow. I handed it back, after reading it, and thanked the man. I looked at my recent priestess, to see if I was still attached, and to what extent I could feel the familiar pull. I wasn't overcome with zeal. When I thought I saw her struggling with something, I could only imagine what that was. She didn't hand me anything to read. Crowded with priests and priestesses, my neck is sore from craning and reaching to remove the cracked and peeling remains of a color that had lost its surface. I enjoy turning a decrepit wall into a wide expanse of unbroken color, even though it's an irritation to my eyes, my ears, and my lungs.

My great curiosity has been to see if the truth promised by my old religion was a given, to see if its rituals aren't merely in place for the satisfaction of the ruling classes of the soul. This is poetry and its miracles, to suddenly live inside the brilliance of another set of cells, to share an instant intimacy, to make love with a stranger as a close companion, to speak from the center

that the self circles at a distance.

His Contented Life

My decaf tastes like espresso. I'm on the Spanish Steps with John Keats, playing the Joseph Severn role, bringing Keats his coffee, listening to Sly Stone on the cosmic stereo. I sit in that young poet's company. He's still present, quietly ethereal, sipping his coffee, his breathing raspy. I enjoy this conceit. Keats was a friendly mentor when I was young. I still feel close to him. I've been writing about death, more symbolic than physical, in all its stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I seem to have reached the final stage in the death of a certain self in the life of the romantic. I'm beginning to live in a post-romantic reality.

I've been dependent on a kind of passionate prana to carry me. In my creativity, I expected it. It's passed to a more constant state, less dramatic, but no less present. I give Keats his cup. He doesn't smile or say anything. He makes no gesture. We've become one with the moment of need and use. Death is at the door. This death is no enemy, no threat. An Italian boy is ready to run the tray back to the trattoria. He'll be back tomorrow, at the same time, whether we need him or not. There's no tip, no waiting to be recognized, no thrill at the company of foreigners. The son of the shop owner, this is what he does in his contented life. "I always make an awkward exit," my friend whispers.

Little Jesus

The café is holding a coffee seminar. My preacher friend is in attendance, along with two other guys. I didn't have the same energy at work, as I did on Monday, coming off the weekend. Today, I was already tired when I got there. I got my wind after lunch, painting on a metal roof, trying to solve a difficult problem. When I'm tired, nothing feels as good or works as well, as it does when I'm rested. I had to abandon the effort at eighty percent done. It felt good, anyway. What interests me about this teaching job, beginning next week, is the dynamic between teacher and student. If it's good, I'm inclined to stay with it, to let it become something unexpected.

When I first began writing longer poems, I noticed Yeats would start a poem, go somewhere else, change again, and then again, until there was no predicting what would happen next. In the last stanza, he'd say something

that would push it further and pull it together in the same few last lines. I once depended on five epiphanies a day. It seemed reasonable for a poem to do no less. Now I'm content to let the routine miracles of imagination occur in the mind of the reader instead of in the pyrotechnics of the poem. Miracles and epiphanies are commonplace. Attention on any subject is enough to witness the occurrence of its miracles and epiphanies.

Driving back from painting, I heard a preacher on the radio say that Jesus was eternal, the same as God. He added that the earliest of Jesus' followers were called "little Jesuses." Little Jesus went to work, Little Jesus had coffee, Little Jesus wrote a poem, Little Jesus was a walking epiphany, Little Jesus was eternal, Little Jesus was a teacher, Little Jesus could walk on metal roofs, Little Jesus got tired, Little Jesus went home happy.

Inside Out, Outside In

The black night fills in behind and around everything in the light. It's a thick success. It's a comfort to weariness. I'm still alone, but I'm not as alone as I say I am. I don't need this teaching job. I could easily let it go. This is change. My body disintegrates, cell by cell, into something it hasn't been. I'm compelled by the transition. I see it occurring. This room is occupied by the young.

"Let's read this first page. Let's see what it says. Let's see where we are. Let's see who we're with and what we're doing. Let me say your name, so you can hear it being said. Let's hear everyone's name. Let's begin the process of words and names. Let's not worry about your education. Paying attention will take care of that."

When I was painting, I jammed my thumb on the ground, getting my balance in the unsettling wind. Now, a new network is forming between the nail and the flesh. I woke up this morning, already painting the house I'm painting. I'll do the same, tomorrow morning. The mind wants to predict the ongoing life of the body.

My attention to work is part of this transition I'm in. I finish this work, so I can begin new work. A 19th Century Chinese immigrant cut his traditional hair, so he could kill his past and be new. It's the promise of America. People come here to reinvent themselves, and the black night fills in behind. I put on my painter uniform. I climb the outside of a house. I put on my poet

uniform. I climb the inside. I put on my teacher uniform. I supervise the climbing of others in their lives.

Overridden By What Didn't Happen

A window, jutting out from the upper story, was the only access to the dormer I needed to paint. I stood on a stool from the attic and stepped onto the sleek metal roof with screw-heads for a foothold, I had to find another way to paint the inaccessible. I tied a rope to a tree on the far side of the house, and threw it over the roof, next to the dormer. I tied a stepladder to the rope, to stand on, and with one foot on top of the ladder,

I lay flat on the slanted roof, stretched out, and reached to paint. I switched the rope and ladder to the other side of the dormer and repeated the operation, but when I moved my foot, the ladder slipped, there was a sudden jerk, and nothing happened. Fear might have overtaken me, but nothing of fear came to mind or body. In the same moment of shock and surprise, with my face next to the blue metal roof, holding the rope in one hand, I glanced at my footing, pulled out a rag, and cleaned the streaks of spilled paint.

I might've laughed in relief, but I didn't. I was overridden by what didn't happen, and when I got back in the window, onto the floor, in the upstairs bedroom, I felt the perfect nothing of the peace that has no biography.

A Stick I Found

I teach the writing of research papers. It reminds me of the absence of such writing in my resume. I've written of the life of the soul in the body of a man. It's a kind of research, where a similar diligence and persistence applies. I'm worried about becoming discursive and prosaic, after receiving some poems from a friend, who writes poetically, one might say. He tosses images on the table and lets them bounce and fall into some order that's not readily apparent. My poems are deceptive. Their narrative is abrupt, interrupted by parallel narratives that are themselves abrupt. Reality is interrupted by alternate realities. I have the claim of an argument, a way of getting to the point, and I'm about to teach precise construction.

George Oppen was a master of the well-made poem. I was sure I'd never be like him, but I began to love the idea of the well-made poem, along with divine and devilish inconsistency, like an apple in the cherry tree, peanut

butter goats, sense in senselessness. I apprentice myself to a gulag. I throw in with bad companions. I pledge marriage to a succubus. I live with my dying mother. I teach research writing. I write poetry, when I might be making love to a drug, a woman, an ideal, or myself. I write what's real, in order to go deeper into reality. As I begin to live among the careful and the practical, I infiltrate my regions, especially the ones I can't see. I prod them with a stick I found.

A Sweet Awe

Yellow, red, orange. The rotating, flashing lights of an ambulance stir the night shadows. When I suffered a heart attack, my housemate called 911. Within minutes, I could hear the ambulance coming. The EMTs swept into my apartment, four young men and a woman. I was in awe of their competence. "This is my heart, isn't it?" I said, and she said, "Yes." She gave me an aspirin, and in the ambulance, I was given a tab of nitroglycerin to thin my blood. It worked so rapidly; I thought I was in my last minutes of life. At the hospital, they took me straight to surgery. I watched, on a screen above my head, a tube inserted in my thigh on its way to my heart.

Today, I played soccer with boys and men, one woman, and a few kids. Yesterday, I finished the house I'm painting, and I got a helpful email from the teacher I'm replacing. My favorite high school teacher, the Gertrude Stein of Moline, Illinois, told us, "*I don't know* is the best thing you can say if you want to learn anything." I believed her. There's a sweet awe in being alive, greater than the game, the pain, the business, the terror, the thrill, the challenge, the routine, the difficulty. It all fades to scenery when simple lessons are taken to heart. They come in moments of recognition.

At thirty, I went to a party given by George and Mary Oppen, who were in their 70s, at the time. In a moment of inspired foolishness, as I played with a tensor lamp, highlighting and describing the various dishes of food on their kitchen table. I saw them watching my antics. I was thirty, but in that moment I became seventy, looking back at myself at thirty. Perhaps, they were then thirty, seeing themselves at seventy. We defy the gravity of our lives in a glimpse. I wanted more than glimpses of mortality's immortality, until I saw the glimpses fill the finite space to its fullness.

The Dreamy Drowse of Fear

Going to teach, I looked forward to sitting close, among passionately alive and present others. It was a large classroom, like a pasture, with students scattered in an arc in the dreamy drowse of fear. They loosened up, toward the end. By then, I had left behind a moment of panic that appeared at the beginning like dead air. With the door open, before the next class, another student entered and sat in invisible silence, unknowingly blending into the wrong fold. He sat in the enveloping daze of his slow movement through the presumed requirements of his matriculation. This morning, I got a call from someone else who wants me to paint their house.

The first day of fall is the last day of summer. The wind is soft and sharp. The sky is gray, with mixed clouds. There's a portent of rain. I'm indoors, for the half year ahead. Next time, we move to a new classroom in a shape more conducive to academic intimacies. I teach a class in the making of argument. For love or a fight, invite too many people for the size of the room, or shrink the room. I have designs on these embodied souls. I want them to press their faces against the window of their lives, and not sit at the back of the room, squinting lazily through the distance.

A famous poet, Robert Creeley, asked me how he could teach us fledgling poets when I was a graduate student in creative writing at San Francisco State. He had no idea what to do. He'd been a literature professor, not a teacher of clouds portending rain. He was at a loss for a form for what we do. I'm in the reverse of that, now. How can I keep myself from teaching beyond this class' prescribed forms of their education? I can only paint the house, and when it's done, it will be protected against the weather. Maybe it'll look better than it did before. I have to go and sign my teaching contract. Winter is coming.

These Costumes Dance by Themselves

To lie with a woman seems a simple thing. It was simple, back in the days when sex was as common as a handshake. Never mind the complications of human hearts. I propose a need for companionship that tests the soul, and I profess a need for passionate embrace. I have believed in it as the engine for my creative mind, and I find I'm beholden to a myth. I invent a dependency where none exists. I become hooked on a noisy ride above a curved earth. Here, in quiet water, I don't need to invite the whirlwind. There's more

resource in these still depths than I find in the storm. Hurricanes tickle the belly of the sea. We give them names and fear for our lives, until they peter out in their aftermath of torrential rain.

Alan Watts, wine bottle in hand, spoke about the great emptiness, playing cosmic hero to his female companions on his houseboat in Sausalito. A monk staring at a wall in Thailand has a persona just as persuasive as anyone else's, even in his practiced union with eternity. These costumes dance by themselves. I signed my contract with the school. This time I read it. I don't want to look up, one day, and discover I'm bound by an indenture.

The two halves of this common sort of contract have been in our hands since before someone first mentioned time and money, since before someone first said, "Who are you?" I'm thrown into the dilemma of who I am. I have two answers, one of them is valid, and the other one keeps me in the game.

A Seat on the Hillside

I look at the flat curving swipe of cleared field on the side of the ridge, and my stomach turns, not in disgust at the delicate desolation of the land, but in an imagined child's slide off the rough wall of hillside onto the smooth plane of open field. In my early manhood, my roommate was taking a shower, when I heard a song on the radio I wanted to listen to. I reached to increase the volume and hesitated a moment. I didn't want his shower to run cold.

Reading in my new textbook, I feel my brain tighten and my eyes grow cloudy. I pause, from time to time. I lean back and take a break. It's not an impossible task but an awkward one. The woman I'm replacing was born to this work. She's found my grammar typical of a poet. I've cashiered several conventions in my writing. I have to reenlist them, in order to teach. I point out the error of my writing to my new students. We're all unaccustomed to the saddle, and it's my job to get us ready to ride.

My eyes seek the hillside. The chapter I'm reading describes the search for truth and the relativism of the Sophists. A radio commentator repeats a question asked of the current leaders. He asks the same hypothetical of the previous administration, one with which he found fault. "I wonder," he says and pauses, hinting at duplicity. His eyebrows rise through the dashboard of my truck. He makes an implicit argument for the dismissal of anyone who doesn't agree with him. I change the station and look to the hills, from

whence cometh my help, and back to this writing, where commas drop like flies on muddy boots.

The Log of My Journey

In the discount store, looking for bottled water, I was directed to the liquor aisle. I saw gallons of burgundy for less than eight bucks each. I noticed my interest in what has no interest for me. I left the store. I've begun a new occupation. It leaves me vulnerable to old avenues of compensation. A window on temptation is thrown open, and I see a pattern of the past. I see twenty-five faces, deserving of my responsibility and the weight of my presence. I can finesse the responsibility I have for myself, but not the responsibility I have for others.

When they were quite young, I watched my mother tell my children about the religion she professed, and I turned to her, in surprising alarm. "You can do that to me," I said, "but you can't do that to them." We're often more conscious of what we feel about others than what we feel about ourselves. Barely responsive to our own needs, our concern is more clearly defined in how we act with others.

One of my students said hi, outside the elevator, and I was pleased to remember her. Then, I noticed that the view from the English Department office is stunning. The building is sealed and solid. I told the secretary, "You can see the wind, but you can't feel it." A willow, by the creek that crosses the campus, was whipped into swirling waves of wind, with leafy branches like masts and sails. The woman, whose place I've taken, was using the copy machine. She's been everywhere I've been, the last few days. I'm being shepherded by an unseen guide. I have no recourse but surrender. I have no platitude but the log of my journey. When I turn to myself for direction, I founder. The responsibility of surrender surpasses me. When I pay attention to it, I fly into the path of the wind, in the direction of its strength.

The Congestion of Eternity

My visa needed renewal, after a week of rain. I went to the magistrate's office, in a new building, unfinished for ten years. There was standing water in the hallways. It was business-as-usual in a surreal landscape. The building was crowded. The lawyer's office was piled high with papers. His inner office was packed floor to ceiling. He was talking to a man from Africa.

They were laughing. The lawyer took my visa and put it aside. I didn't know if he wanted a bribe. I wasn't versed in the protocol of civil bribery. After more conversation and laughter, the lawyer held my passport and laughed, he opened it and stamped it, all the time laughing, and I left, thanking the lawyer several times, namaste, namaste, down four flights of stairs, with laughter ringing in the halls, into four inches of water, out into the bright, noisy, crowded street.

On the first days of teaching, my brain is stacked floor to ceiling with papers. It's odd work, being a poet with a job. When I read poems at a political rally in the city, in the 70s, it seemed ironic to hear poems read as a call to action. Poetry brings everything to a halt, and then, maybe, something might open. Poetry says, "Start slowly, slow down, stop. Now, you're getting somewhere."

At Folsom Prison, the assistant warden asked if I was going to read anything subversive in the prison writer's workshop. "Only a few poems," I said, and thought, "There's nothing more subversive than poetry." The brilliant sun cuts the air away from its complacency. I have no choice in this unofficial act of surrender. There's a story sought for everything, and in everything, there is no story.

Inviting the Crows

When I was a kid, I was fond of telephone poles and telephone lines. I imagined a kind of sled, to ride the lines across the country. I always liked the way crows sat on the lines, like The Flying Wallendas on a break. My friend says he has "lots of cancer" in his prostate. I doubted the word "lots" was in the diagnosis, but on a scale of one to five, he's at four, and that sounds like lots to me. He tells me he used to imagine a band of crows that comes to pluck out the unwanted elements in his body. The crows fly with this contraband to the mouth of a volcano, where they let the unwanted goods go. The intense heat turns the crows to glass. They fly back and forth, until the unwanted parts are gone. He says he's just invited the crows to help him again.

I did inner child work, once. It wasn't my cup of tea, until I fell into an emotional pit, and then I remembered my child self. I got to know him. I talked to him. I cared for him. My child self advised me. I listened to him. I don't believe such things exist, but it was wise for me to listen to him. We

became friends. He told me, "I don't want you to hire any more babysitters." I agreed, and I said, "I will never leave you." There may be no such thing as an inner child, but our silent conversations became important. He was like the stuffed buffalo I took on a car trip. I don't keep stuffed animals, and I don't believe in a name for what we call God.

If you invade the reality of anything, to its core, you arrive at the inescapable reality that there's nothing more than nothing there. That nothing is the source of everything we worship, love and fear. I talked to the woman of my heart for about an hour. She was happy when I said her name, and she said mine. We invite the crows with our naming. My friend is vehement about the absence of a nameable god in a spiritual universe, but he invites the crows to help him. He knows there are no crows tempered by heat from the earth's core. I said to my friend, "It's hard to talk to her without watching my expectation grow." The crows come and go.

The Rest of the Dance

She's as thick as I am. She's a great beauty. She's an ordinary woman. Her profile stirs me. I rise up, to match the presence of the possibility. She's brilliant, mundane, she tries too hard, her language bursts alive. We fall into an ease, we bump against each other, I borrow her water.

The courteous street lamp at night stands tall and erect but bends over the road. It never wavers, it holds constant. Its amber light is a lantern held high to light the path on this nearly deserted high desert. Calling no attention to itself, the light spreads itself as far as it can. Summer has come and gone, then come again. It will be warm for days ahead. The council of laborers held a meeting nearby. The announcement is still in place, long after the meeting has come and gone. Our rendezvous, in the early afternoon, has come and gone.

I've come and gone with her. She's no longer a place of expectation. I no longer want to pull her to me or push her away. I'm at ease with the possibility of her remaining as she is, another one of the remarkable others. In order to accomplish this in my thinking mind, I seem angry. A lion looks with disdain at the gazelle it's been chasing, only to see it fall at his feet. The gazelle is exhausted, not by the lion's attack, but by the weariness of the chase. The lion surrenders its effort. The gazelle surrenders its flight. The lion is angered by its own presumptions. It lies beside the gazelle, breathing

deep. One of the beauties of the dance is its rest.

Indian Summer

There's no reason not to know everything. Knowledge is at our fingertips. I wonder about "Indian Summer," as the hot days continue past the Autumnal Equinox. It threatens what's right, in the clock of the body, at this latitude, at least. In the movie, "Gallipoli," about World War I in Turkey, I noticed, for the first time, that the world was once a place where there were no paved roads. The earth was beneath our human feet everywhere we went. I look across a tile floor, and I see unevenness. Then I look up to the faces of the old couple waiting. The broken plane of their faces reminds me of the earth. Three Japanese girls come in, then an Indian girl, then a row of men of varied shapes and sizes. The girls are as American as apple strudel. I play soccer on a field awash in Spanish exhortations.

After my brother graduated from college, he went back, months later, and the house he lived in was gone, erased from the landscape. The land was covered with new grass. He went downtown to his favorite pizza parlor. His best friend had lived above it. The entire city block was gone. I went back to the city I loved, after eight years away. The city had been cleared of the reality I had happily inhabited for seventeen years. There was no community, as I had known it. My mother and father have ceased to exist in this reality. The challenge of change can be startling.

A bowlegged man, standing nearby, on his way from one town to another, was once unimagined by those here now, and he will be unimagined, once again. Everything we do, to make the images of this transient wonder permanent, leaves us with a excess of illusion and an abundance of wrenching loss. If my friend dies, my baggage will be heavier. He's grown lighter in the thought of his mortality. He made a painting like bars of sunrise. When the end is in sight, the beginning becomes permanent, and the only memory is the dirt road underfoot.

This Ancient Terror

It's been revealed that our nation has cemented relations with another nation by threatening to "bomb it back to the Stone Age." Its leader said the remark was rude, but, as a general who took power in a coup, he understands the politics of power. He knows that it insures his power, at least for a while.

His power has been at risk in fourteen attempts on his life. We accept the roles we play, when those roles are all we believe about ourselves. Two couples come in. The women wear mesh bonnets, like insect netting. The husbands are dressed like local men on a weekend. Their wives wear floor-length skirts and no makeup. All are members of a church society.

When I was a teenager, the fashion among boys was flattop haircuts with pomade to keep their hair standing up. I had thin hair and a big nose. I soon abandoned the fashion. The girls wore cashmere sweaters, if they could afford them. They looked like soft fur angels.

If everyone tells us to do something, we'll do it. If most people tell us to do something, we'll probably do it. If some people tell us to do something, we may still do it. If only a few people tell us to do something, we may not do it. If no one tells us to do something, we may do it anyway. If we don't know what to do, we may look in the face of the unknown and recognize what's always been true.

The general appeared on TV, telling his story of coercion, as casually as if he was telling a story of his life in school. His death may come as a social humiliation or a crowning achievement. He seems to have come to an acceptance in his revelation. Or else it's resignation. It makes me want to cry. I wondered why, except to cleanse this feeling of hopelessness. I was grateful he opened up the book of his membership in the club of our ancient rituals of crudest belonging and basest survival.

I Wince at Invisible Injuries

I feel the pinch of loneliness when I fail to open the aloneness that fills me. Identity saturates my fear. When I let go of attachment to the other, what feels like loss becomes fullness. There's no familiar language for this contradiction. A man alone in his contentment might seem self-satisfied and egotistical like a drunkard's approximation of bliss. We don't easily trust any version of serenity. We laud the virtue of serenity, but rich discontent is the norm. Satisfaction of spirit is reserved for the insane and the saintly, and in the querulous mind, a no-man's land between them is joined.

In my desire to be in the presence of others, I witness the haunting shadow of aloneness, and that becomes the template of imagination. We understand to the limits of our understanding. We can't describe the wilderness we

never enter. I miss the focus of my attachment when I miss her, when missing her becomes the focus of my thinking. I feel attached to what feels torn away. I wince at invisible injuries.

God for the Mystery

My eyes are heavy. I want to drop into a sleepy numbness, not from the burdens of this life, but in relief from the burdens I set for myself. My third session with students gave me a chance to feel at peace with the weight of it, and I'm lighter in my ease. My friend's wife, on hearing poems of mine read to her, fell into a rage that I was caught up in the personal pronoun, I, that skinny stand-in for who we are. I don't begrudge her the judgment. I've had time to think about its use. I've been doing it for a long time.

In high school English, we were told to never begin a sentence with the word I. My teacher in India proposed that we ask ourselves, "Who am I?" and let the answer become apparent by going deeper into the answer than thinking could go. I ask the question, "Who am I?" at the top of every page. I let the answer become something beyond its limitations and not the subject of personal confession.

My teacher told his teacher, one day, that his family had been pleading with him to help them escape the war that broke out between Muslims and Hindus after World War II. "But my family is illusion to me," he said to his revered teacher. His teacher replied, "If your family is illusion to you, then it will be easy for you to take care of them." He left his teacher and went to help his family. He got them out before the slaughter. It didn't make him less conscious of the illusory.

The Sophists argued that truth is what those in power say is true. Socrates said that what's true is what is proven to be true. There's too much depth, in what my students are studying, to move too quickly past these questions, but the syllabus demands it. Time is short. I say the truth is what is always true. The truth doesn't come and go. What comes and goes is only relatively true.

Arrows fly out from the bow, and we search for meaning in their flight. We chase after where they might land, when where they came from is the source of their identity. Whenever I say I, I begin to misrepresent the truth. Saying I for the self is the same as saying God for the mystery. We are all arrows flying away from the bow. My friend's wife has spoken the quandary of our

lives. Where is the core of who we are? Is it in the other? Is it in the self? Is it in the ethereal? Is it in the physical? Where's the source of our oceanic self? Is it in the rain? Is it in the river? Is it in the evaporating sea?

Hand Puppet of the Soul

The grass beside the canal has been trimmed. A split plank holds sprinkler-heads beneath the surface. It's an old system. The long grass at the water's edge is uncut. There are long, curving fronds in a sweep that the deep green water moved through. I find a small silver battery on the ground. I could say, "There's a battery on the ground beside the lush canal," leaving out the personal, but every word we say has I in front of it. Silence is the only antidote. Everything we do has I in front of it. Inaction is the only cure for that. Even our presence has I in front of it. Death is the only salvation for our presence. Then we leave I behind.

I ran into a teacher who looked familiar. She said she waited on me, last year, in a local restaurant. Her name is a variation of mine. We share the same office. I told the secretary it's unlikely I'll ever use it. It's a small room with three occupants. I told my officemate I probably should sit in the chair at least once.

I could be more personal in my writing, if I cared about the personal run-up to any single moment and its aftermath. I could feel personal about what I do, as if I'm the one originating it. But my actions are millions of years old. At the source of every thought is either our history or the open mystery. What nerve we have, standing on stage, in whatever drama we enact for a casting director who's no longer around. We stand mid-stage, or in the wings, or in the back, or on the side, proud of, or unhappy with, our part, as if we are the character we play. We walk off stage, and the praise or the criticism continues, for our ongoing portrayal of ourselves.

And where am I now? On a street, in a restaurant, at home, at an awards banquet, or standing in line, hoping for benefits from the state, on my way to make copies, walking by a canal. Picking up a small battery and fingering it for a hundred yards, until I pass a trash can. Then into the building, up the elevator, into the office, meeting another teacher with a similar name, finding a book of poems from another professor. This other poet uses the personal pronoun in her poems. I is the hand puppet of her soul. It makes her a focal point in a nameless eternity.

Becoming Someone Made Real

Who I am is who I am. Profound and ridiculous; this being of self inhabits and engulfs my self. Of those who spend time with a master, most return to their lives unchanged. In the presence of my eternity, I return to my mundanity. We seldom leave what's familiar, like sailors who can't leave the sea; we lose the taste for the land. In a meeting for the saving of lives, one man drones on, followed by another. One man speaks his comfortable belief. Another man speaks a kind of assurance.

A third man risks the terror of meeting his unseen self, in his shame and degradation, in the foolishness of his façades. The public lie of his life isn't his undoing. The private lie of his secret pain is. This is the path to the clearing called grace. A heart clogged with grand mal seizures becomes a heart set free in its wide expanse. This room has comfortable furniture, people come and go, someone waves from beyond the dark glass. Between who I am and how I am, I ease into being someone made real by the reality I bring to it, in simply being.

So That's What I Do

Cocteau says poets are writers who don't write. I have taken a job teaching functional writing. It's counter-intuitive. Let me tell you the seven reasons for a new bill in the legislature. I empty my tongue and stare at the wall. Anyone, who sits in the middle of himself, sits in the middle of the world.

"Astonish us," Cocteau has a friend tell the old poet, Orphee. It's what he tells himself. And then he does just that. Walking on a street, wondering if he can find a house to use in his movie, he hears his own voice in the air. A boy, inside the house, is listening to a recording of Cocteau speaking. He knocks at the door and the boy answers, astonished. Cocteau is invited in, and he sees that the house is the perfect house for his movie.

Orpheus walks his wife out of the Underworld. He looks back at her and loses her. He tells Death he loves her, as loves his wife, and Death confesses that she loves him. Death releases him and his wife, and they live happily ever after. All this occurs in a moment. Ecclesiastes says all of life is meaningless. When Proust took his youthful writing to the great writers of Paris, they told him, "Your sentences are too long." "So that's what I do," he said to himself.

I use the world I in my poems. Did you see “world” appear in that sentence? “I use the world I”, I said. Another name for that which became God was “I Am.” How presumptuous for a cell to engage its singular identity. “I Am” is the same as every cell that lives. It’s the identity of one and all. We’re each a smorgasbord of identity. “Astonish us, little cell, little I.”

The Myth of Our Time

In my private myth of her time with another man, I thought the man wanted her to join him so she could further her own artistry. It turns out his motive was baser. He wanted her flesh, more than he wanted her wonder. The woman, in my poem of her, held the chalice of lost chances in her bitter lips. I asked her what happened to the art of those days, and she could barely recall. Most of the innocent wisdom of our youth is lost. We’re poor guardians of newly minted coins. As shiny as they are, we seem shinier.

We sat beside each other in a simple complicity of nearness, reading the poems of our time together and apart. I said I had lifted her off the pedestal she was on and placed her on the ground. She was a perfect image for the pedestal, and the ground is perfect for her standing. Time takes time to disappear. The myth of our time passes into history. Our history becomes our mythology, after it’s been stripped of its time.

Every Step Became a Brief Constellation

A few years ago, I stood beside the car, waiting for my mother to rise to her feet and walk slowly beside me to the door of the restaurant. Here I see an old man repeat the same ritual with his wife. It’s the world at short paces. I swat flies with my hand in the September heat. I believe that what she wants from me is less than what I’m able to give. I believe she wants only what she’s prepared to receive. My life with my mother shrank, from what I could imagine between us, to what she was capable of doing. Every step became a brief constellation. There are more parts to what we do than we notice at normal speed.

The warm sun lies across the tabletops and floor like a comforter. I say it’s so, because I’m comforted by it. The light is airy thick with a presence. I say it’s so, because I feel a presence. When I describe any woman other than my mother, I could also be describing her, in receding degrees.

Because I choose to tell the truth, I need to be at peace with confusion. I see parts of the real running back and forth across each other, sliding in and out of each other. We name distinctions within distinctions, and still there's confusion. She continues to be a confusion in my mind. I can live with the confusion of truth. Everything has its miracle, in the face it shows, and in our ordinary mirrors.

Pulling the Earth Inside Out

I tell these stories, and there's love in the dance, but I want to stand over my volcano and pull the earth inside out. When I don't care about the price of things, I'll pay any price. When the imagination is tied to the floor, it dreams of a red purse on the table. I think I'm finally outside my familiar inspiration. I don't see myself writing for her ear, anymore.

My mother said she couldn't give speeches for the local book club, even though they invited her. She said she could only do it for God. As much as I wring the laundry of my spirit, on a daily basis, I can't write only for myself.

I made her human the way she wanted me to. Now that she's in the flesh, her elevation has declined. What is it with these humans that they don't want to be gods? Haven't we had enough of the separation between human and god in how we live in this reality? Leaving the higher work for others, we refuse to become what we dream.

In the Mix of the Ordinary

I pulled her off a high pedestal, and I pulled myself down with her, to the ground, where we both say we want to be. The loss of elevation is a shock to my sensibilities. I feel demolished. My statuary is reduced to rubble. I look at the rubble for a reading of the future. Across the road, I see a truck backing up to a highway sign. I imagine the sign toppling, but nothing happens. I made money in the farmers market, this morning. I got home to an even greater insurance bill, so I decided the insurance was a bargain. Being in the mix of the ordinary raises its head, every day.

In the market, a cute and furry puppy, with teeth as sharp as razors, dug into my hand as I tried to protect my shoelaces from his desire to chew on them. Now I have tracks of dried blood on the back of my hand. In the showboating bravado of one of my students, I saw how the president gets

away with his current war. If you want to impress one bad guy, who you're reluctant to take on, you beat up on another bad guy, who's within easy reach and less of a threat. Men and boys think it's the law of the jungle, but insects, not apes, rule the terrorist jungle. The deadly scorpions and the diseased mosquitos don't care about the show of force. There's a muscle tightening in my right forearm. I think it's a heart attack. My new dentist said a bad tooth could bleed bacteria into my vulnerable heart.

It isn't that I miss her, it's that I miss my mind of her. I miss the way I had her in mind, and the way she helped me keep in mind of the spirit. I don't believe God has a plan for me. I no longer live in magical thinking. I have no will to conquer the world, and now I let go of woman as my earthly heaven. I'm left in a world of wondrous disbelief, with nothing to heighten me or bring me down but what is.

The Fact of Our Breathing

In my dream, a woman was by my side. We seemed so completely compatible, I asked if she was a prostitute, but I didn't get an answer. I was left with the fact of our breathing together. In years of living alone, I've been given the gift of women in my dreams. They're with me and gone, never to return, never alike, always different, always compatible with what I'm experiencing at the time. They never look like anyone I've ever known or come to know. They rise like Eve from between one of my own ribs.

I once suggested to my brother that if he wanted to meet the woman of his dreams, he should become the man he hoped he'd be after the woman he desired had arrived, and then the woman of his dreams would recognize him. Instead, he dresses like a woman in his mirror and calls his version of himself his own wife. He tries to manufacture acceptance in a physical form. My dreams are another mating ritual. There's no assurance that anything will agree with my heart. I pay attention to what's already in agreement. I answer my own prayers in stillness, with less imagination.

The woman next to me flops her hands on top of each other, on the arm of her chair. The man with her, raises his thumb to his eye, lifts his cup, drains it, and pops it on the table between them. She spreads her hands in a seated curtsy. He slides his palm across the arm of his chair in a languorous sweep, while her foot twists in a circle, beneath the hem of her skirt. He bows deeply, into his belly.

Those who want to become a leader of others fill every moment of fear and wonder with words. It comes naturally to them, but silence billows like the sea of heaven. Beneath the wonderful terror of this being here, I wonder how many people know how to scoop silence in their hands. The woman in my dreams knew how to scoop silence in her hands. It left me bewildered with happiness.

A Nation of Tiny Dancers

Cocteau said that movies would become an art form when the materials were as cheap as a pencil and a piece of paper. My friend said you're an artist when you can make art with a pencil and a paper bag. The same guy said you're a comedian when you can be funny any place, any time. It was then I knew I couldn't make a career of being funny. I'm a dancer. The orchestra and chorus of molecules in the cells won't let me move without their influence. Each one of us is a nation of tiny dancers.

A Deep Bed of Sunlight

In this sarcophagus of calm, I think about our current war, where there is no calm. Here at home, my appetite for turmoil is squelched by cowboy gentility. The air is cool, everyone's at work, school is in session, and no bombs are falling. The only improvised explosive device is desire, and even that's in short supply. Twenty years away from my youth, I went back home, looking for quiet discontent in the populace. I thought I would find a secret urgency. I expected to find the thwarted desire I thought I had escaped. I discovered the population was at ease in their satisfaction and their dissatisfaction. Complaining was the only alternative to despair and it served as its own fulfillment.

In the depths of my addiction, I had a dream of green faces floating in front of me. They were faces I'd never seen anywhere else. I surmised they were the faces of the dead, warning me, waiting for me to join them. Dreams are dramas written for the one who dreams them. Life is six billion dramas being enacted at once, each for the one witness to himself. People go insane, trying to escape their own theatre, shouting fire with no one else present. As an alternative, we enter into each other's drama. There's a coffin on everyone's stage, gleaming with light from within, like a deep bed of sunlight.

I said hello to my ninety-year-old friend, as he was talking to a hairdresser. She was showing him photos of her vacation in Mexico. He likes to tell the story of standing on the running board of a car in Texas, seventy-five years ago, with a gun in his hand, wondering if he had enough bullets to kill everyone in the family he was threatening. Something gave him pause. They lived, and so did he. His story became part of my story.

A man went from his hometown in China to a conference in New Orleans, and when he got back, he told everyone what they, not he, had seen and done. He was an extension of the town. He was an extension of them. They were happy to hear about their trip, and he was happy not to have gone alone. The war raging in the world, rages in this quiet town, fought by our common hand.

Grace Over Details

Peace doesn't have much character, until you've lived in it for a few years. One man I know said he didn't like the word God. He wanted another way to think of it. Breaking the letters into phrases, none of them were satisfying. I said G-O-D could be Grace Over Details. Grace over details means to surrender to an awareness greater than private thought, to let go of control of everything, to refuse to pick up control when it's offered. This is grace over details, the freedom to fuck up and the freedom from fucking up.

Another man, reading about an ancient conversation between God and Lucifer, said that whenever he got close to God, Lucifer was right there, trying to break it up, like evil incarnate, like disembodied evil. It didn't occur to him that these various characters run off on their own, and get lost on the way. An artist friend says, "Let's get lost and find our way back." It's the brilliant start of a new religion, like the brilliant start of all the others. Peace doesn't seem to have much character, until you sit in it for a while, and then it comes alive like the end of a war, when the habits of warfare have begun to die away.

This Smoky Dream

My father was in the hospital because he'd driven off the road and couldn't remember how it happened. The doctor pointed to an indistinct point in a cloud formation and said he might live six months. Mother said we wouldn't tell him. I said I didn't live that way. But she was his wife, and that's the

way it was going to be. Two weeks later, the tumor had disappeared. I told her not to lie to me, too. But it wasn't a lie. He lived twenty more years. After the operation to remove the fluid on his brain, it frightened me to see him drive his car, wildly, recklessly, like a maniac, until I realized he wasn't driving like a man with a brain tumor, he was driving like a teenager, like a daredevil. He was rejuvenating himself.

Smoke from a cigarette appears in the air and disappears. A smoker stands by an open truck door, wearing a t-shirt, on this overcast day. My father died of emphysema. "Enthymeme" was the subject of today's lesson, literally, "in the mind." It refers to an argument that assumes the truth of a premise and omits any mention of that premise from the discussion. My father thought cigarettes had nothing to do with his fatally injured lungs. The smoke that became my father blew in and out of him. I hold my smokiness in empty hands. We emulate our fathers and mothers. Mine have gone to smoke. They appeared outside the mouth of creation, lingered a while, and disappeared in the air.

My father was a big man, with hands like small animals. He couldn't contain their activity. Chained to his arms, their scope was checked by his reach. He whacked me five times in my memory. One time, it sent me across the room into a mirrored closet. I was more amazed than hurt, but his physical presence had been firmly established. My hand struck my son when he was a baby. I looked at my hand in wonder. "Whose hand is that?" I asked myself.

I felt my father's presence in who I was becoming. I reached out, another time, and I saw my father's hand, my hand, and my son's hand, all in one hand, across the generations. I looked at the snowy Minnesota landscape outside his hospital room, beautiful in its grays, whites, and pale browns, in a rainbow of muted shades. He pinched a nurse like a waitress. He pinched himself, on the arm, to wake himself up from his smoky dream of life and death.

Someone Wrote a Letter

In a dream, someone hand-wrote a letter, signed my name to it, and offered it to me for my approval. Later, I watched, in a documentary, an aide write a letter for General Montgomery to send to General Eisenhower. Montgomery reluctantly signed it. Ike had said Monty couldn't remain in charge. It was election year, back in the States, and if he didn't let the Americans take over,

it might be bad for the president. Monty didn't argue, but the Germans began dropping V-2 rockets on England, and Monty's plan won out. Generals make public pledges of loyalty and sing the praise of other generals, all the while believing in their own interest. No matter how many are lost, it's the sort of unwavering bravado we expect from our leaders.

I stepped across the kitchen floor, and I thought, "My life's been good." My eyes twinkle in moments of despair, and I generally feel sanguine about my life, but only recently have I begun to call all of my life good.

In my parents' house, when I was a boy, there was a bank of cupboards in the basement, next to the ping-pong table. One afternoon, home alone, I went rifling through the compartments. I went inside one crawlspace behind a door, where I sat in the damp cool of a summer day. My hands explored the packed boxes. I touched the objects of our family's accumulation, like an amateur archaeologist in the ancient digs of his oddly familiar past. I didn't find any treasure in my explorations, except the sense of overlapping lives, looking, touching, feeling around in the storage of a family, so that when I walked back up the stairs, my childhood was behind me.

This Fortune

As if suddenly, I see myself not trying to become anything, not trying to impress anyone. I have become only myself. I feel honored by who I've become. I honor him. As if suddenly, I recognize a man in my flesh I hadn't seen before. It's a sense of a man that's pervasive, genuine, anchored in the bone. The man I walk inside of being, no longer waits to become what he's capable of. A mongoose swallows a snake with a mongoose in its belly, and he becomes a king.

When something occurs in the way things occur and we're conscious of the occurrence, we marvel at being human, to witness it unfold into itself. Unselfconsciously, walking in my room, I notice the presence I've seen in the lives of others. It's presence I've seen coming in my own life, until it became this inevitability. I'd seen his parts before, but I hadn't seen the parts together, with nothing apart from the whole, and with no more frustration in its incompleteness. I don't mean he's done. The work of this good fortune has just begun. I'm like a man in a movie, but the story is mine, and this poem is its lingering image.

She Means It

A skinny column in *The New Yorker*, about an artist who paints small paintings, describes the qualities of her work. The review ends with the startled observation that she does something rare, “She means it.” It’s a good way to clear out the art schools, the galleries, the graveyards, the churches, the halls of Congress, and the movie theatres. There’s a certain actor who doesn’t just get my attention, he’s worth my attention. He acts as if he means it. He means it, in who he is, and who he plays. The person who stands in front of a painting and means it, is just as rare.

There was a café, outside the ashram, that catered to the dissidents, those who didn’t belong to the self-chosen. In a place where freedom from thought was the byword, thought still kept its grip. The serious among us can be too serious, unless we’re just as serious about play. Seriousness is addictive, but true play satisfies. True play fills. Until the next meal, there’s no need to eat or drink more play. Two ashram habitués were talking about another guru, a man who was still alive, who was holding sat sang (being in the presence of truth) in his living room. They said he had lived in the West.

I said he used to work as a desk clerk in a hotel in Italy. They were curious. I said every time he rang the little bell, he experienced satori. I was kidding, but nobody laughed. I hadn’t met the man, and I was making light of the purest light. Two months later, I went across India to see the same man, and my time with him opened my heart to itself. He meant it. So did I. There were no tinkling bells. There were no triggers to satori. There was nothing but empty, meaningless, nameless satori itself.

A Fearful Naked Constancy

Twenty of us sit in a cave, protected from the outside by our communion. We tell our stories. We share the warm fire of companionship. Each one of us has a piece of the common fear and its damage. We discover we think the worst. It becomes a kind of comfort. In the telling of fears, in the company of others, I find a reason to return to the cave, secure in the habit of fear’s embrace. Willingness for the worst to occur is a path to freedom, or it’s a home away from the deepest part of the heart, a place to practice the rituals of my failure to become what I might imagine, a place where I leave my dreams in safekeeping, to visit them in the exhibit of their cherished possibilities.

Dreamers live in dreams and dream of still more dreams. Some live in the absence of dreams or in broken dreams. Some live in a shattered dreamscape of what cannot be. Some invent a haven, to live at peace with bad things happening, a kind of homemade heaven of earth on earth. Inside my fear, is true escape, or I run back to the caves, like a prisoner of war re-captured. I return to the welcoming arms I cannot leave, for fear of being free in a world beyond the cave, where freedom terrifies, where unprotected dreams come true or die, in a fearful, naked constancy.

In the Quiet Windless Aftermath

After the hurricane between us passed, I come back to poke among the ruins, looking for something to remind me of the possibilities. I find, in the rubble, traces of love that remains. I see myself standing in the quiet, windless aftermath, a startled survivor who's flown with the cows and the roofs and the cars. In that stillness, with the airborne flotsam and jetsam on the ground, I find myself grounded, like being dropped from the sky, intact. In this stillness, none of the anxiety remains, I don't run toward her or run away, I stand where rooms once were, where walls, ceilings and floors once were, I stand where the sky remains, and the earth, and the air, and the stillness, that didn't go anywhere.

Some part of who I am lives in the beginning, to live again at the end, but early on, there's a drive to solidify. And then the wind comes howling; nature's cruel clearance of everything must go. What remains has the nature of what's within. Its character is less defined, but closer to the nature of remaining than to anything it might be called. I scan the littered landscape of my permanence, still in place, when everything else is lost.

The Love that Lives in Who I Am

"It would be a shame if I died tonight in my sleep, but it would be perfect," I thought. I cried, when I realized I was fully the love that lives in who I am. And I thought it would be a shame if I didn't get to be free inside this body for a while longer. The feeling of being perfectly drunk, in that induced illusion that becomes the exaggeration of what is and isn't, pales by comparison to this awareness. This is the being that was approximated with the juice, but there's no approximation in this. Peace and wonder are not being stretched into a parody of themselves.

I turned off the movie I was watching. I sat in my chair and shook. "It's happened," I said. I never thought it would happen. It reminded me of the poem I wrote to a woman, thirty years ago. I said in the poem that I had been looking for myself outside myself. I looked for my bones in the bones of others. And here I am now, inside who I am. And my desire for another has had nothing to do with it. This is my moment of arrival. I have someone to share this with, someone to tell, someone who knows what I'm thinking and feeling, someone who knows, without saying, someone who is the same as I am. I speak to my own ears, my own eyes, my own heart, in my own body, and I know what I am saying.

The Absence of the Dawn

One wants to erase the separations so there's no distance to overcome, so fear and the need to understand are eliminated. The first drink I ever took entered me like a trace element that completed the chemistry. I wasn't made better or different, or less dull, as my girlfriend, who brought me the booze, thought might happen, but less separate from everything around me, including her. We slept together, got married, chose our professions, had children, moved across the country, and the elementary absence remained.

Two decades later, because I didn't want to die at the hands of my illusions, I dropped the chemistry of my poorly imagined salvation and entered a slow progression toward recognizing completion. When I quit drinking, I locked into a freedom whose work was immediate and slow. I waited for the fulfillment of its extraordinary beauty. Engulfed in peace, I was impatient with peace. Imbued with endurance, I was impatient in my breathing. Gifted with recognition, I was impatient with happiness.

I didn't know how to step over the line I knew didn't exist. Some things happen to all of us over time. Some things come from everything that came before. Some things happen without precedent or antecedent. What was absent was not an absence but the fundamental separation that belongs to everyone. I felt it sharply, and I felt it for a long time, and now I feel the absence of that separation. My sense of separation is gone.

One can have one's life destroyed by the absence of something that isn't absent. Until what feels absent is discovered to be present, an impatience remains, an inkling of absence. The more one senses the imminent possibility of nothing being absent, the more one feels the absence that

defines it. And then it's gone. The absence is gone. Look at the beauty of that dawn. It's gone. Look at the absence of that dawn. It's gone.

A Course to the Core

Milan Kundera talks about the youthfulness of the lyric poet and the maturity of the novelist. He says the poet always returns to himself in his words. He says the youth cannot leave himself. He says lyricism is the refuge of immaturity. I paraphrase Kundera. The young barista leans over the counter. His bald head shines in the light from the recessed lights in the ceiling. You try to run away from yourself. Then you notice how closely you're being followed. I stood with a novelist in the farmers market, this morning. She lamented how short she was.

Show me someone who has managed to leave himself behind, by talking about someone else, and I'll show you someone looking for recognition in someone else's eyes. A little self-recognition is a dangerous thing. A lot of self-recognition is dangerous to the myth of egotism. "Who am I?" is the only question we ask, without ceasing, for as long as we breathe. The answers we often accept are the inadequate retelling of someone else's denial of who they are. There's a kind of self-defense in the pretense that we can't push through the veil of self and find a more inclusive landscape.

My friend was an understudy to a self-help guru who lost followers, after five great years. It's a common occurrence among casual seekers. We have a tendency to adopt these methods, until we open up what hurts. In pain, we drop the cure and return to the surface, where we may safely begin again, looking for another way to the core. We keep looking for another new path to the ancient heart of our existence, especially when it means losing what we think we've gained in our attachments.

Orpheus goes to the underworld and comes out, but when he turns to his wife, she leaves him. I think, "She'd rather die than hang out with a lyric poet." I'm tired of references to poets as frilly lightweights. It's like putting a tutu on a nuclear weapon. Every juvenile romantic, with the heart to stick with it, stands to discover a course to the core.

A Seer of Uncommon Awareness

Years ago, I went with a girlfriend to see a psychic. I figured out later that

being with that lover was like two years of one-night stands. Being with her was like having no past and no future, always living in the uncertain present. It was a real life imitation of the truest reality. She was surprised how serious I was in the company of the psychic. I treated the session like an audience with a seer of uncommon awareness. We met with a rather large woman in her nicely furnished, middle-class house. The room was crowded with mostly older women, wanting to know about health, relationships, and the departed. The psychic said a few remarkable things to me. I don't remember what they were, but it felt significant at the time.

Years later, I lived with a psychic whose picture was eventually on the cover of a magazine. I thought of her as a kind of oral poet. She could look at anyone and read that person's imagery. With her good looks, bright colors, and effervescent energy, she was much loved and successful. When she got cancer at 50, she tried every trick in the book of her spiritual methods to cure it. Nothing worked. It was a sad and tragic end to a woman of boundless energy and contagious joy.

These gods of our imagining are poltergeists of rather special dimension. Things happen that go unexplained. When I was in a terrible state, raw from years of too much drinking, I stared at an ornate glass box of clear marbles. It jumped toward me off the console it was sitting on and smashed on the floor, in front of a friend's television set. There was no explanation for the phenomenon, except the energy of an agitated mind.

What if the Grand Canyon were dug with one swipe from a cougar's paw when the cougar was looking for salmon to feed her children? Would the belief in that story make the canyon even grander? Or would it only throw a distraction on the stunning miracle of what's already extraordinarily real?

Black Elk Speaks for Us All

I thought of her on the way out the door. I spoke to her the way I could have spoken to myself. "You value who you are," I said, "but you don't value yourself. You let others undervalue you, and you let that mistaken identity continue." These habits are hard to break. They settle in. My soccer buddy said the little player in his head tells him how badly he's playing, no matter how well he does. I said it started with me in grade school. He said it started with him as a sperm. He said the other sperm mocked him.

I'm not speaking about people who aren't good at anything or have a rotten disposition. I'm speaking about those who others think well of and speak highly of, but who don't value themselves as highly. The only reason they have any inkling of the injustice is because they've seen the evidence. The assumption about sensitive people is that they have a weakness. Instead, it may demonstrate an acute consciousness that, if it were prized, would be recognized for its virtue. Black Elk was a sensitive kid, prone to having visions, especially when he was sick. His parents were normal folks, who didn't know what to do with such a child, so they sought out the local shaman.

The shaman listened to the boy spout his incoherent ramblings and he heard a precocious wisdom, something the boy's parents couldn't fathom. After all, they had jobs and responsibilities. Black Elk's parents sought the perspective of a wise man who took one look at the boy and saw what was going on. Black Elk's delirious narration had meat on its fantastic bones. He was encouraged to continue his virtuous skills. When the Poet Laureate of Nebraska appeared at his doorstep when he was ninety, Black Elk said, "I was waiting for you. I wasn't sure you were coming."

Be Here When You Can

My friend and I were excited about opening a coffeehouse down by the river. We imagined a place for music and dancing, poetry and art, theatre, books, coffee, wine and beer. We found a likely spot. We looked through the window and called the number on the sign. It was a lawyer's office. He was enthusiastic about renting a place that had sat idle since the previous year's flood. He called the owner and then told us that we'd all meet at the site. We felt like brilliant young men with a great plan.

When we got there, the lawyer asked more questions. Who was our clientele going to be? "Everybody," we said. It was then that the project abruptly foundered. The owner and the lawyer conferred, off to the side. Their demeanor had changed. Then the owner said the joists were too far apart for dancing. My friend was a carpenter, and he knew the rules about joists. He said they weren't too far apart. But the deal was scuttled. They said they were sorry, and I bet they were. An abandoned building in the poor part of town lost its renters. We never got to open our café. Our meetinghouse would have been on the edge of what was called the ghetto.

A black guy I knew in the factory called it “The Grotto,” in a mocking voice. “I don’t live in no damn grotto,” he said. Our clientele would have been racially mixed. The reality of the owner’s argument didn’t register, until we were driving away.

I wonder about the reality that never occurs? What about when things are imagined but they are never realized? All we know is what happens. What doesn’t happen, never happens. I got a job working on a cruise ship, and then the union of ship workers went on strike. I was supposed to be in a Department of Agriculture movie, but the funding lost its appropriation. I’m here, now, writing. I might be dead in a crossfire shoot out with racist cops. I might be married to a Norwegian girl who worked on the cruise ship. I could be writing the memoirs of my career in the movies. I could be relaxing on my plantation in the Philippines, as two girls predicted in our sixth-grade class prophecy.

The road not taken is not one road but a shattered prism of endless possibilities. The past and the future are a refuse heap of possibilities. The past and the future are a storage facility given weight by the mind that imagines its contents. When Ram Dass (Richard Alpert) wrote his book, “Be Here Now,” I went in the restroom of the Owl and the Monkey Café and wrote on the wall, “Pee Here Now.” I went back out and read the book. I found out he wasn’t kidding. He meant it.

A Lush Island

She throws up an invisible shield, whenever she feels threatened. Her voice gets a little louder. She becomes one of the boys. I notice it and leave it alone. I’m safely vulnerable in a kind of penetrable peace. Before I stopped drinking, I remember sitting in a friend’s car while he and his girlfriend went in a store. I felt a familiar panic. I was incapable of being at peace. I was in prison, in the back seat. I couldn’t imagine escape. I accepted my imprisonment. I had no alternative, until my first moment of true peace came, and that became a foundation. It occurred over time, but time is only what becomes time.

I saw the stillness inside who I am, like a lush island in a gradually receding lake of fear. I could be who I am, in the heart of who I was. I’m only one human being, in a crowd of six billion. We all have stillness within us. I thought I might gain peace by searching the pockets of the crowd of billions

for the half dozen keys to freedom I'd heard about, but being a pickpocket didn't work for me. She said, "How are you?" and we hugged, the way passengers in the same boat often do. I wanted to feel the rejection I thought I saw in her sweet, friendly standoffishness. I wanted to search the world for a new intimacy, but the luxury of my stillness prevents me from re-inventing an apocalypse or a utopia.

Lost in the Physical

The sun ducks behind a wall, and the oven door closes. The room cools. I walk into a room and see that those who got there first, had turned off the lights, leaving only a lamp to light the room. I didn't like it. The dark is cold and bright lights seem warm. Nobody agreed with me, and the lights stayed off. I was left to contemplate the light and the dark.

Once, in a panic, brought on by a severely broken tooth, I felt unresolvable pain, then fear, and then beneath that, I felt only terror. In that moment, I saw a naked baby, lying on a black road in the pitch-black night in the middle of nowhere, with no one around, and that became my image of terror. It was cold for that naked baby. The dark is a symbol of cold, the light a symbol of warmth. It makes primal sense. The sun warms us. The world grows cold in its absence. One night, in the city, a girl came running in, announcing an eclipse of the moon. "You're a poet," she said, "aren't you interested?" "I'm a sun poet," I said, "the moon is a cold reflection of the sun."

The sun sneaks back from the wall and tosses its blanket of light across my legs, stretched out in front of me. My brother wants me to come live with him in Hawaii. It's a vacation Mecca, and everyone feels good on vacation. The sun lets me feel good about myself and my fellow man. The sun warms the elements, until it seems as if the borders of the skin dissolve. I want to get lost in the physical. I imagine fleshy women in my fantasies. I want to get lost in the physical. I stay in love with this sun.

Dancer on a Distant Stage

There are those who dance across the spectrum but never dance deep within themselves. There are those whose spectrum is narrow but still dance deep within that limitation. Those in the narrow band may condemn those whose spectrum is wide. Those of a wide spectrum may condemn the narrow. The

full spectrum is the property of anyone who dances. We're all dancers in the possibility of who we are. We become what we're capable of being. We're capable of being whatever any one of us might become. My friend was one among thousands of artists in the city, and his lover was a dancer. I went to see her dance as a member of a celebrated dance company. I remarked on the quality of the dancers, each one as good as the one before. I hadn't thought of her as being anyone different from the rest, and then she began to dance. She lightly lifted above the floor and began to fly, and the reality was changed. She became what dancers imagine of themselves. Her seeming the same as everyone else astounded me.

Seeing her dance, I became what I hadn't imagined occurring until it was before me. I became one with the dancer who dances what we imagine. We can imagine anything. I didn't try to become a dancer, then and there, but my heart flew, to dance with her, its own greater dance. Any one who dances to the greatest breadth and depth, dances our dance. They dances out from within us. I looked down on a stage, and she pulled my heart to its realization. She became who I was, who I am, who we are, in the heart of our barely imagined freedom.

Across an Awkward Room

I want to get lost in this woman's simple beauty. She matches the face of my abandonment. Others are more beautiful. I can look at their beauty as one might an object, but with her, I can't stay in contained amazement. I can't keep her in a place of practiced worship. I want to lose myself in who she is, in that which is neither of us. I have devoted myself to the luxury of this surrender. I'm with her in this love that's hers, too, as Rumi and his mentor fell into the love that opened between them. I can't love this instance of love, without this love coming to the center that we share. We're uniquely together, as free in love as we are apart.

I write a poem of myself, until it's no longer who I am. I love her until it's no longer who she is. We're not in love, but love is in itself. I see how much I love her beauty, but that love distracts me from looking at her. I can't see who she is in her beauty. I look away, so I can hear her speaking her unique life. I admire her, and I appreciate her, until I look back at her beauty, and then I want to get lost in it, free from thought. I let this abandonment overtake my thoughts. I know the surety of my abilities. I can live in small ways. I can live in the practical. I know the function of my life and hers. Any

one of a million catches could erase my surrender, but it doesn't. I know what lovers coo in their romances, but I've seen the wayward face of God in one who sits across an awkward room, and I want to find its unchanging reality.

The Syllogism of Love

I began writing love poems when I stopped drinking. Alcohol had become a blockage I didn't know existed until it was gone. I met a woman, and the poems centered on her, but they had already begun before I met her. The intensity of what I was feeling took her name. I gave her credit, but she wasn't the source of the expression, nor was she the source of the love. I could see she was their object. It's easy to follow the arrows of love, away from the bow, and forget the intention that held the bow. From then on, every time I fell in love, I began another round of poems. Every time I began writing, I fell in love. I could see that the source of love was still within. I was free to write from that revelation, but I still fell in love with its object.

A sentiment of love, passing itself off as an inherent truth, becomes the inherent truth of love that gets passed off as a lovely sentiment. I'm capable of mistaking my inherency for an accident. I'm capable of embracing the superficial and ignoring the real. I don't need someone to love, for my heart to be in love itself. I don't need to be in this love to have my desires fulfilled. This love has its approximation in the life of desire.

Gilding the Rita

Passion and Grace

Passion and grace, the two fires of my life, have burned me to the forest floor. She said, in her kindness, “You’ve been deprived of my most naked, scathing, defect-ridden self.” I agreed. “This is a deprivation and not a kindness,” I said. “That’s a lesser evil,” she said. “Our attempt to carry on a kind of limited relationship is difficult and sad, in light of the shared awareness and understanding you and I have.”

I can feel my emotions emerge from the forest floor. They re-emerge from beneath the burned surface. Small animals appear, the heartiest survivors of this tentative revolution, the rebirth of the nation of the young and the green. Breathe, when you hold your breath. Run, when you stand still. See, when you close your eyes. Wake up, when you sleep. Live, when you die.

Meaning to the Light

The beauty of the young is the beauty of a new day. The sun bakes the anticipation of winter out of the air. What had seemed like a coat, closing around a chilled body, has become pale arms emerging from dark sleeves. Everything has meaning, because we give it meaning. Everything seems to deserve meaning, like wanting to erect a giant arrow pointing to the sun. She seems to want to come closer to me. I seem to want to cry from happiness. My grateful mind seems to want to reinvent heaven from her desire. I seem to want her in my arms. I seem to move about inside her psyche and make of it a matching reality to this ordinary ecstasy.

I seem to recognize an old friend from my youth in the city. If I truly believed it was he, I’d be out of this chair like a rocket. It tempers my inclination to create a novel from the bare bones of a character sketch. I give meaning to the light. I give a love to loving. I point off to the side of anything, so it can flourish, without holding my attention on the meaning I’m inclined to attach to it. I remove my heavy clothing in the heat of the resurgent sun.

I Swallowed the Sun

I attach myself to whatever is warm. I push away whatever is cold. I attach myself to whatever is cold. I push away whatever is warm. I remember the lessons I learned in the beginning. We carry a bond to our first lessons, no matter how hurtful they may have been. We carry, even deeper, within ourselves, the memory of the thing we may never have learned. When she's warm to me, I'm drawn to her. When she's cold to me, I'm drawn to her, as if they are the same. I've tried to make myself warm in a cold world. My love of the subtropics comes from the warm air I first felt, stepping off the plane. It felt like swimming in warm water. I habitually swim in cold water in a cold world, and these are two of the relative realities I live in.

For twenty years, alcohol was a blessing to my cold body. I swallowed the sun. Then for twenty years, I swallowed God. These were two of my three homes. A warm animal sleeps on a warm rock in the night. In the day, he hunts, until he sleeps on warm leaves in the night. I thought my home was in need of heat, but I am my home. I am the fire of my solace. I swim in warm water wherever I go. I am the warm animal of the sun. I am the sun of my own night.

Platitudes of Paradise

I don't want to describe what's no longer true, when what remains, remains true. It remains, despite losing its brilliant twin. In the court of my love for her and her love for me, I had to walk away from what didn't happen, not from what did. What did not happen became something to hold onto, to no avail. Like the death of a loved one, the death of a love seems a cruel fate. Any shortened life is the end of what was. We mourn the end of what might have been. Of all the lives that have been and all the lives that did not fulfill themselves, life itself does not so hurtfully end.

I dream of what might have been, and I dream of what never was. When I do that, I drop the love of what is, that I always have with me. I'm free to love what is, as long as I don't keep trying to love what is not. A child cries on the drive back from the closed amusement park, paying no attention to the stunning scenery or the loving company.

Despite all the available platitudes of paradise, my love for another has become the reality of living another day. I can't look this face of my

imagination in the eye and keep feeding it any more soporifics. I can't describe another example of my love. I can't repeat any more love of my example.

The End of the Passage

I think I am a hard man. As much as I talk of love, I'm a hard man, born among hard people. As much as we laugh and softly upholster our lives, I seek out hard people to love. I discover the same familiar disappointment, in trying to love them, in trying to receive their love. I idealize the lives of tender people, but when I imagine being among them, I step away. I once wanted to become a gentle man as the way forward in my life. Much of my life is couched in gentle recognitions, in the forgiveness of others, and in stark images of the barest and most naked existence. I've been doing penance for my deprivation. When I wasn't tricking myself into feeling warm and cared for by intoxicants, my mind began to think that holding a child was pedophilia, that holding a woman was rape, that holding a friend was homosexuality, that holding myself was Onanism.

I granted myself the love of spirit and art. I say these harsh things, on a day when I feel, once again, the rejection of a desired love. I don't believe what I'm saying. I only believe its limitations. I know better than to take the word of an unhappy man. I am a kind man. I cherish the tender gestures of love spoken between the least of us. Sometimes I need to go to the end of the darkest passage, to turn and see the light I leave behind, as if hopelessly.

Wrapped up in Paper

I've lost faith in anger. Anger leaves me with anger's residue. A wooden drumstick runs the rims of my eyes, like a spoon in an empty bowl. It's not important for me to understand anything, but to pay attention, even to this. I continue to love the way things have their secrets. I love secrets, not in their being kept, as secrets are, but in their being revealed, as secrets desire to be. Every secret runs against its own locked door, slamming against it with its body, crying out for the door to open, until there are no more doors and no more secrets. I sit in a cell, unwrapping this present, this package that I wrapped for myself in my other life as the keeper of these cells. Unwrapping papers, I find a gift in the center of the wrapping. It is a picture, on the inside of the package, a picture of my wrapped papers, wrapped up in their own paper, this paper I'm holding.

A Separate Union

I sit in the center of the universe, watching everything and everyone come around me, just as I go around the center of everyone else's universe. As much as I know I am the center of the universe, I know everyone else is, too, and I know everyone else feels the same, unless they're addled or softly beaten into submission by an ideology of social selflessness. Let's get this out in the open, once and for all. There's no escaping it. You've been living inside your own consciousness. You know you've never been able to leave where you are. You are inside who you are. Even when you take on the character of selflessness, you're still the one at its center.

We can now admit this fact of human consciousness. We can accept the idea that, since we're all the same in this reality, it must follow that we're all the center of the universe. It must follow that the center of the universe is ubiquitously impersonal and exceptionally personal, at the same time, depending on one's perception of it. Something that is so profound, so personal, so universal, must hint of something beyond its temporary housing. There is an identity parceled out to everyone and to no one in particular. We all play the same character, in the same drama, each with a personal claim to the same reality. No matter how common we are, in union with this essential being, we are unique.

How can such a thing be so common, so wide spread, so indistinguishable and so unique, everywhere it appears? It can't be, but it is. We're right to think these two things at once. Each one of us is the only one. And, we're identical, not like siblings but one identity, in endless variations. No one is free from this unmistakable identity of separated union. This awareness is the key to our freedom.

The Watching of the Waiting

I've been heartbroken before, but this time I stand where heartbroken used to stand, not in self-pity or self-congratulations. I can describe a place that's unreported in my experience. It's a bleak and serene terrain. This is the stage of the waiting for Godot, but this moment comes after the realization that no one's coming, after the realization that no one is ever coming. Waiting has been a self-conceived drama. This is not the familiar drama, presented to an audience that's gotten used to the watching of the waiting. That drama, that watching of the waiting is a safer joy than this reality of realities.

There's no sadness in this stranded occasion. The war has passed, as have the celebrations of victory and defeat. The stage is empty. The drama has passed. As have the anticipation of curtain raising and curtain lowering. This is the moment that Godot says, "See? This is what I was talking about." This is the moment that's generally and quickly filled with anger, fear, hope, desire, confusion, demand, and despair. Barring those, what appears is a love of spirit and place, by spirit and place itself.

Ah, the empty stage. To say this would be a good time to die would admit affection for my sense of being caught between life and death. This is the presence of what's present when even absence is absent. This is the reality that is, when absence is not replaced by anything or nothing. Godot is gone into his never having been. The audience has returned to where they were before the drama began. The drama has receded to never having been imagined. The stage has become an empty space, emptied even of its emptiness. It's difficult to erase all that's been imagined, in any place, until it occurs in the reality of no one watching and no one being watched. This is being itself, unimagined by any being.

Gilding the Rita

I let another mask drop, when picking up another mask might have seemed more kind. I wake to a stark simplicity. There was a time when this might have been the indication of a disturbance. This clearing damages nothing. When my feet are cold, I get used to it. There's a feverish passion that competes for this clarity. Mind wants its version to replace what it doesn't understand. Most of what we cherish is a substitute for the reality that it shoves out of the way. Rita Hayworth said men went to bed with the sultry vamp Gilda and woke up with her, disappointed in the real. I long for such an opportunity.

Disappointment is an open door to a cleaner room with fresher air. Last year's broken relationship comes in the room and takes the chair next to mine. It isn't until she's two feet away that I realize it isn't she. The resemblance is remarkable. I'm delightfully disappointed in the absence I welcome. I sit for a moment in the memory of egocentric accusations. My heart begins to fibrillate. This woman wears the same clothing, has the same profile, and moves in a familiar way. I feel the transference of my thoughts to hers. She's a certain kind of dance master, and I am her willing student, until my shoes are broken, and then my ankles.

Because she is nearly here, I remember the romantic disorder, living in familiar derangement, outside the center, living in a constant threat to trusting myself. I remember a delicate dislocation replacing balance. In a state of balance, trust in oneself can spread to include others. A gradual distrust replaces the trust that might have grown. In a life of romantic disorder, in the wrinkled and twisted skin of wearing masks that don't fit, even those masks becomes safely, predictably, and comfortably known, enough to hide this wonder of being alone with raw peace.

The Economical Heart

We're taught to love each other, when there's a love in us that needs no teaching. We're taught to love beyond ourselves, when the inclination to be human already acts that way. We're taught to belong among our kind, when escaping our kind is never a thought. We're taught, until we begin to look for what's not being told and what's left unsaid.

The North Beach of Intention

I was acting my nature in a bar, one night, playing, having a good time, when a friend scoffed at my behavior, mocking me. Another friend said, "You're wrong. There's intention in his actions." I nearly wept with sudden elation. Someone had seen who I was, before I saw it. I felt a kinship in his recognition. Now, reading the papers of my students, I look for intention in their words, in the space between the words, to see which ones mean what they say, not in vehemence or idealism, not in anger or willfulness, but in the air of their phrasing, in the smell of their ink, in the blood of their punctuation. One of the things that glued my attention to the woman I recently left to her own life was the commitment she felt toward her work. It's not the same work as mine, but she showed the same intention to be present in what matters, even knowing that nothing matters.

This artificial reality, as overwhelming and nuanced as it is, that we layer on top of the brilliant and beautiful natural reality we're born to, is ascribed to our civilizing ambitions and the forces that came before us to make us who we think we are. At the center of the center of all that, there's an intentionality that has nothing to do with making or being made. It's the intention for the entirety to fulfill itself in our fulfillment, and it's up to us to accept the joy that fulfillment brings.

The Names of the Unnamed

Those of us who name things ought to disclaim the profession. We ought to take back the names of our naming as soon as we proclaim them. Our definitions ought to be in doubt as soon as they're announced. Nobody knows how to relax. Animals, at ease, are at attention. Their eyes and ears spring to action at the slightest movement. Human beings are the same. Dagwood naps on his couch. Nobody believes such a beautiful thing could happen for them. An old hound dog lazes in the dirt. His decrepit conditions demand it, but we see a beauty in his apparent ease. We envy the drunk his selfish freedom, as much as we know how he got there. "Ol' Man River, he don't do nothin'." Nonsense, he keeps on rolling. My old Pappy said he wanted to swim across the Mississippi, but he said he got tired, halfway across, so he turned around and swam back.

The sloth sleeps, hanging from a tree. We call him a sinner. We think we could do that, too, if we had the financial guarantees. Retirement is for rest, recreation, and relaxation, but we call it a kind of death, a slow slide toward permanent immobility. Cats look relaxed, so we condemn cats for their self-centered nature. We hire people to help us relax, to create relaxation in our bodies, like an emotional and physical middleman. We hire religionists to cut us some slack in the big picture. We think there must be a name for the way we relax, so we can call it an activity, not the virtual letting go that it is.

We think that letting go is having your talons de-clawed and your sharp teeth removed. Anyone in the business of naming ought to retire after every word, ought to relax between sentences, and should forget how to do it, over and over again. The inherent nature of relaxation is to be at peace in the mind, but the mind labels that as a kind of death, knowing the very idea threatens its hegemony.

Zero Sum Love

Religion, everywhere among us, offers the approximate answer to an approximate question, when at the core, the absence of the real question is the absence of the need for an answer. The only satisfaction lies in the acceptance and awareness of who we are. Pornography, everywhere among us, offers satisfaction where none can be had. Those, who manufacture sexuality, hump and bump, they grab each other like thieves or customers. They give love like mercenary merchants or groveling servants. They put an

appealing face on what we desire, to get what they desire. Most of the time, we make love like the pornographers, but deeper in ourselves, we seek a physical love that doesn't exist in the mind or the body.

I seek to be physically in love as a true relaxation. It's the same moment of relaxation I discover in the opening moment of making a poem. It's the letting go of the self. It's the surrender that's avoided in all our forms. The resolution of an obsession isn't overcoming it but diving to its center. We find the answer to any question where the question no longer exists. Arrival is the end of the search. The love of the other is the relaxation of the search. Arrival is a meeting place that becomes no one's private reality.

Higher Ground

When we got fairly close, she was happy, and I wanted to be closer. When we were nearly close, she was content, and I was discontent. I was the wife at home, and she would come home from the road. She would come home from being at sea, willing to be happy with limited love. She saw the loss of never going beyond the limitations of our distance. She said I never got to see her darker side. I said it was a deprivation to not see who she was. But I'm happy to leave contentious misery out of a deeper intimacy. There was a time when to reveal quarreling natures was a sign of intimacy, a noisy imitation of communion. I'm ready to sit in reassuring stillness and open the time to what's always been true.

A poet friend goes to visit his old mother. He calls her a poet manqué. She responds to his questions with poetic imagination. She talks to his suggested numbers and colors, as if they are people. She gives advice to Biblical figures. The intimacy he describes in their mutual poems lets me love my own mother more, in the moment, in this open moment. I'm both halves of an endless love affair. I hold open my half. I don't need to see anyone's darker side, or show my own, to have this love. I go inside this love as far as I'm willing to go.

Walking On Heaven

The compromises of the soul don't compromise the soul. They compromise the compromiser. The soul remains unaffected. I watch the fog pull the world together. One molecule leads to another. We're held in an envelopment of gray reassurance. The brilliant light of the sun is softened to

a dull iridescence. Some people's gods live underground. Their heaven is beneath their feet. When deities are moved to the sky and its higher regions, we lose the calming warmth of walking on heaven. Heaven is removed to a distance of thought and imagination.

When spirit is clothed in air, we walk around under its thin idea. The fog makes the air feel more like earth. The fog makes the mind like a pair of feet walking in the realm of the beyond. Far becomes part of nearness, enough to consider it a friend. Every part of thought ought to be a place we can walk, not some foreign exile. The fog makes everything closer, including the parts of the world that can't be reached in a walk. Every compromise we make of the soul makes it seem all the more unreachable. The soul is homeland to all its citizens, who only think they've gone away.

In an Unbroken Moment

"Poets aspire within, novelists aspire without - without hope," I thought as I awoke. "I don't want to die, I love living my life." Time is running out on the possibilities, as it does for everyone. I live among those who are acutely aware of their mortality. There's a malaise of pleasant greetings and quiet fear. Dying is not the issue. I'm sure I'll die the way most die, in simple surrender. Being dead is not the issue. I accept the inevitable; it has an embrace I don't find unwelcome. But the narrowing canyon of the future narrows my attention. Death will occur like anything that occurs. Death simply occurs, and it's done, as if an acquaintance approached and touched me on the cheek, and anything I might have thought about death evaporates, before I can speak. In the final unbroken moment, I'm gone from the argument.

I'm living in a town that will change from the town I'm in. It will become another town, and I won't be here for the change. People will look back and speak about this time, as if it were dramatic and self-aware or blank and dumb. That's the perspective of the past from the present that hasn't occurred yet. Paris in the 1920s was the self-conscious reality that aped the Paris of the 1890s. That period followed the Paris of the 1860s, when the future was unrecognizable. One could say the 1860s was when Paris was most alive. People who move to a new town say their beliefs don't change, but we're always influenced by our surroundings, at least in how we are surrounded. I am surrounded by this reality.

The Truth about Beauty

In the movies, I sat next to the woman I lived with, last year. It was obviously not she, but I enjoyed the possibility it might be. It was better that it wasn't. This language is as polite and distant as the encounter was. She was not who she is, she was another woman. The movie was about mistaken identity. Near the end of the movie, I looked at my hands at the ends of my arms, extended from this body, a body I inhabit as if it is who I am. This woman had a familiar profile, but her posture was wrong. There's no masking the energy that identifies our movements. We're more able to recognize each other from the energy that moves us, than we're able to recognize the forms we move in.

I often sit next to old lovers in this movie I live in, even those who are no longer present. In "Shoot the Piano Player," the main character steps onto a balcony overlooking the boulevard in Paris in 1959. When I first saw it, I was thrilled to see real people, unconscious of their immortality, appearing in a movie, crossing the street. The images are the only thing that's immortal about the movie. Even those images run the risk of being lost. In another scene, I see boys on a street, running, walking, and standing, but what breaks my heart are the things of this ungraspable moment that has no life, other than being the essence of our identity.

The piano player drives his old car, desperately, sliding on an icy slick country road, in a mad chase to save his criminal brothers from a pair of crooks. It breaks my heart to think of the snow melting, the pistons pounding, the cheap leather seats in the car cracking in the cold winter air, the echoing gunshots, the vapor from his waitress girlfriend's mouth, as she lies dying in the snowy white field. It isn't the dying that breaks my heart; it's the evidence of transient beauty, erased, over and over. Beauty is replaced by beauty. Everything is beautiful, being born and dying, constantly, endlessly.

Love Letters to the Universe

They've never sent a poet into space, so we're left with descriptions of the moon and earth as "beyond words, something to behold, an amazing sight, one small step for man," an even smaller step for the imagination. I failed miserably in my class on Friday, forgetting the handout sheet that would have made the assignment clear. Instead, I left class for fifteen minutes, asking them, in my absence, to create havoc that'd bring shame upon us all.

A woman about my age, with a metal cane, walks by stiffly. She shoves a hand in her stretch pants and scratches her left buttock. Looking out from behind thick lenses, she laughs and smiles. She eats a cookie with tea, accompanied by her attentive son.

In Keats' time, every educated man was a writer of poetry, yet few called themselves poet. They reserved that recognition for those like Keats. Most were content to be well-rounded professionals. Not until I became content, in being no more wet than the rest of the ocean, could I accept my peculiar nature as one wave among others, as one wave who thinks he might have something to write home about. We are waves, like walking angels, telling the story of our crashing on the shore, composing, over and over, these little love letters to the universe.

Storm Clouds

The dark gray clouds hang on the hills like a storm that got tired and lay down on the job. In its sleep, it lifts a lazy arm. It turns slowly on its side and pulls the cover with it. It drags itself to its feet and walks slowly out of the room. It leaves behind a bank of lighter gray clouds, softer, more attentive to the distant storm. I'm hesitant to tell one more personal story of love lost and the aftermath.

In a football game, one player's opposite number taunts him. He reacts in anger and is charged with retaliation. I imagine the coach telling him to hold the anger in and use it in the next set of plays. And so I lie in repose, cumulus and stratus, suffering my silence, until I realize no one is coming back to bed. The light comes pouring in the room, turning my gray to a brightening blue. I mourn my loss with sun, instead of clouds, and my eyes awake to clear sky.

The Same Sinking Boat

There's some idea that the more we think about ourselves, the more we delve deeper into ourselves, the more unhappy we become. Self-awareness is thought of as a deadly pursuit, or at least pointless, if not harmful and self-indulgent, as if we are cesspools of egocentric sin. We're told to devote ourselves to the wellbeing of others. But, in that construct, aren't these others also the unworthy centers of their own attention? Aren't they the ones

being told to devote themselves to others, such as we are to them? Isn't this a curious circle of attention? If I'm unworthy of my own attention, isn't everyone else in the same sinking boat?

Deep within each of us is not the sludge of despair and ruin, but also the light source that fires the universe. To discover that source, within oneself, is to recognize the same light in everyone else. I woke up this morning from dreams of dissatisfying conclusion. I began to doubt myself, and I felt unloved and unwanted. A few hours later, I looked out on a roomful of vulnerable faces, getting ready to read their essays aloud, and I got to look deep into their unprotected, gentle presence. I saw them, as I see myself. I see myself, as I saw them. It's a blessing to think well of others and devote myself to them, after I've come from a round of forgiveness for the cloudiness that covers my own brilliant origin.

Fame Like Fate

My muse, the object of my creativity, the one to whom I speak, the female focal point that inspires my attention, the one to whom I address myself, is no longer in the picture. I find myself uncomfortable writing for my inner muse. Then it occurs to me, who don't I court fame, instead? I have not sought fame. Neither have I had the device of seeking fame. Instead, I've sought the fickle, fleeting, and faded embrace of women.

This lover, fame, like fate, is sought in many ways, most of which I have avoided or sought with faint heart. But what if she were my lover? What if she were the one I ought to be seeking? What if she is the true poet's wife, the one I've been seeking in the faces of mortal women? She may be waiting for me, if only I give in to this pursuit. Fame, like fate, is not to be had in one way, in one shape, at one time. Fame, like fate, is in the room, but she isn't some other person in the room. She's unconfined. Her glance is not found in the face of only one. She can be seen in the face of many. Fame, like fate, is fickle, especially if I'm fickle to her and pick someone else.

Fame, like fate, is not praise or love. It's not blind acceptance or fawning adoration. It's in the room, like air. It's in the air, like sight. It's in one's sight, like vision. It's in one's vision, like knowing. It's in one's knowing, like being itself. A consciousness that stirs the heart to action, fame is not jealous in her particular attention. Fame, like fate, is a gate to a greater shape in boundless address. Her mortal sisters are not my lover. I give myself to

this love. I love you, fame like fate. You're my lover, my fate. You're the one that's true, as least as true as any other. I demur. I decline. I smile.

The Asceticism of Response

I know a man in town who speaks with brilliant bursts of awareness and then guffaws, laughing away his brilliance in a clownish display of embarrassed surprise. If he were to say what he regularly says and leave it in the air, it could live another day. An old lover said we were doing something right, because we could call each other on our bullshit. What if we were in the habit of calling each other on our brilliance? What if my friend's bursts of awareness were preserved in the present, to carry on or remain standing by themselves on the strength of their own legs?

He said he needed to cultivate an asceticism of response, instead of making histrionic demonstrations of face-saving silliness. Most intelligent people show the common courtesy of keeping their creative intelligence within bounds, so we can all feel comfortable and unthreatened. But there doesn't need to be a contest of brilliance, only an opening to it.

I once felt responsible to talk to anyone who would talk to me, including the boring and the dull, but I found that the boring differ from the dull. The dull are merely dull. The boring insist on imposing their dullness on others. I learned that offering them no response was effective. My silence left the boring with no foil, it left the dull in silence, and it left me at peace. I watch my friend speaking, and I imagine the rich quiet, after his brilliant outbursts, as the space and time for the luxurious asceticism of his response.

Gratitude

I was feeling unwanted, feeling the loss of a relationship that I wanted, until I walked into a classroom, engaged with students, and my spirit was lifted. This is not, as the platitude would have it, the desired state called "getting out of myself." The others of my attention don't take me out of myself. They take me into myself, to a part of myself that isn't stuck in thought. Christmas decorations are everywhere in the days after Halloween before Thanksgiving. If I were in Bali, I'd be absorbing other decorative impressions.

The first time I went to Honolulu, in '75, I saw graffiti in a men's room that denigrated the Portuguese. It was alien to my experience, like hearing someone spit venom toward pudding, poodles, or bow-legged Martians. In a

meeting, asked to speak on the subject of gratitude, I wasn't feeling grateful, but when I considered it, I remembered that the only prayer, when all is said and done, is, "Thank you." I feel gratitude to my students, not for taking me out of myself, but for giving me a place to speak from that part of myself that has no self to it.

The Time of Terror and Joy

I turn my memories of terror into memories of joy by recognizing the joy that once sat unrecognized, inside my terror. That joy went unrecognized, even behind the face of family happiness. Happiness was the order of the day in those years of unacknowledged terror and joy. Terror and joy are words for the wordless reality of existence. After birth, a transition is made, from being witness to what is, to being witness to what was and what will be.

After all these years, I can't leave this open subject alone. I came into this life as if I'd forgotten something and had to go back and get it. I left it on the table, before I got dressed for this incarnation. I've been compelled to retrieve it. I brought an absence with me I can't ignore. There is, within me, an absence that has the thickness of presence. It's the same for everyone. We look at the slightest vacancy and say there needs to be something there, in its place. This is the core of addictions and other surrenders meant to fill that absence that never seems to go away. It's only when I drop into the terror of absence, and then slip quietly beneath it, into the emptiness of its timeless origin, that I let go of this inquiry and discover the joy that fill my endless vacancy.

The Falconer Cannot Heed the Falcon

A young falconer is telling his two friends about his adventures, working with falcons, eagles, the police, and those who don't understand his dedication. He speaks like he's addressing an audience of listeners. When I was his age, a girlfriend told me, "You talk like you're speaking to a roomful of people, no matter how many there are." It changed my focus. I began to think of each person, one at a time. This man demonstrates an enthusiasm for his life and the perspective it's given him. He's devoted to a single purpose. He has a sweat-stained cap, dirty pants and shirt, dirty and calloused hands. He tells insider statistics and professional information like a survival guide to the world of his intensity.

“It’s hard to be a successful falconer,” he says, “because of the laws regulating the hunting of prey. If a falcon goes after a particular rabbit, you can’t tell the falcon to back off, even if it’s picked an endangered species. It’s your bird. You are responsible for what it kills. You can go to jail for the choices the falcon makes.” So many things are like that, including the stories we tell of the people we know and love. If only it were more clear in the heart. If only the falcon’s actions were listed, before, during and after its flight. “You turn around, and somebody’s out to get you,” the falconer says. He’s beleaguered in his passion.

It’s been reported for fifty years that Gertrude Stein gave advice that put Jews at risk in occupied Paris. Her story also tells about an incident of her compassion that occurred after the Germans left the city, and the moral is benign. Everything I say is at least a nano-second past the reality that gave it birth, or even days past, or years, or lifetimes. My passion has affected the way others act with me. I interpret relationships from that perspective. In time, I’ve seen others fall back into the self they were, before we met. The woman who gave me such good advice about how I was acting, speaking to others, was kind, caring, supportive, and passionless in her love. I thought I was a hot, heartless cad in the world of her cool, caring kindness.

Emily’s Backyard

I don’t go into prayer and poetry to relieve myself of the burdens of self. I don’t pray to attach myself to a power greater than myself. I become prayerful to call up from within myself an expectant emptiness. This life is the bowl of a vessel to be filled. We are fed at birth by the revelation of a new life. There’s nothing personal in this call to be still.

When I go in my imagination into Emily Dickinson’s backyard, I notice the tumultuous vitality of her garden. I wonder at the silent generator of all that tumult. I feel a terrifying sadness, a sinking feeling, a sense of dread. The feeling passes. I don’t know how to get back to it. I think it might be her father, after he’s dead, or her God. I mourn her death, standing in her father’s yard, her home. It is the bower of her poetry. I’ve had two occasions in memory that recall the same sense.

Twice, I involuntarily entered the emptiness between time’s moments. One time, I felt absolute terror. The other time I felt perfect peace. This is the fear and the joy of our origin. As humans, born of the energy we call spirit, this is

the attraction and the dread of encountering ourselves at the source of our being. To occupy the empty vessel of oneself is to be willing to find what has filled it with stone and kept us from experiencing the emptiness of fulfillment. This is to lift and let go of whatever darkens our concavity. Prayer and poetry clear this self of its own darkness. This is to enjoy the energy and the light that fill the bowl. This is the buzz and murmur of my own fertile garden in the universe of Emily's unconfined imagination.

A Prisoner's Cave in Heaven

The emotions of the day affect the actions of the day. I thought I was too emotional, and I thought I was dead to emotion. I thought I was a passionate sociopath, a cold-blooded poetic sob sister, a hard-hearted irrational romantic who doesn't feel anything, a stoic Swede in love with the Blues, a poet of the heart. I thought I was inclined to absolute truth. I thought I was a spiritual man who calls this state of awareness more real than spiritual. I thought I was an empathetic spirit who knows he can never truly know the character of another soul. I've had ulcers and a heart attack. I've been a hypochondriac. I cry when people who are strange to me love each other. And I'm alone.

On occasion, I write a poem about my aloneness. It's like a painter who paints a self-portrait. I don't do it as a habit or as a resource, but every once in a while, it falls to me to tell the truth I've avoided and can't escape. I am alone. No one I've been with has felt disposed to dispel this aloneness. I don't think anyone could, if they tried. I've been thrust into aloneness, not by my uniqueness but by my absolute commonality. I say this thing, so we can all hear it. I am alone.

In my emotional heart, I hate this truth about my virtual life, but I have no choice. I wish I had a choice. I'd prefer to fall in with everyone else and celebrate the lovely belonging we all seem to cherish. I have pictures of it on my wall in this prisoner's cave in heaven. I'm overcome with a love for everyone who doesn't have to bear this truth, for everyone who feels it as a rejection from everyone else, who longs, as I do, for the embrace of a loved one.

Yet I am one who feels the love that resides within, the love that dissolves the separations. This is a prisoner's cave in heaven, this mind, this ego, this self, and the only thing that frees me is the awareness that lives beyond my

confinement. I am alone in my cave, and my aloneness is my freedom. This cave is not a cage. I am its prisoner, only by my common confinement. As soon as I see my cave for what it is, I see heaven in my being what I am.

Snow on the Cars

I get along with others. I don't do anything to make it happen. There's nothing to be done. It's already done. It's done in the way we're the same. We're here and it's done. I do what I can to get along with the separations. There's snow on the cars coming through town. It's snowing west or east of here, in the passes or on the river. It isn't she I miss, but some part of myself. She came to sit by me, before the speech I gave, the other night. A man asked, after I spoke, after she and I talked, after I introduced them to each other, after she went to talk to others, "Is she your wife?" "No," I said, "she's not my wife, she's my friend."

I am alone. I'm less alone, when I'm alone, than I am when I think I'm not. I'm more alone, when I try not to be alone. I'm more alone, when I think there's something to be done for me to be with her, or anyone. My aloneness has never let me down. It fills me. Desire has never filled me with anything but more desire. Missing her doesn't hurt me. I don't want to admit that. I want it to not be true. Wanting her seems to fill me. It truly fills me, to admit, in my aloneness, how being with her is not my salvation. I am alone in my salvation.

Side Door to My Heart

When I don't listen through personal ears, I hear the train whistle at 4AM and don't attribute some story to the sound. A train whistle doesn't become sound effects for my experience. Like a train whistle, I think she has a side door to my heart, but I can't open or close what has no door. As long as I imagine a door, I imagine it opening and closing.

"I am alone" is the only mantra that works in my heart. I'm afraid to say it aloud, because it's true. This admission strikes my ears like a bell, and resonates deep within who I am. These words erase themselves in my spirit, but it has taken time for them to reach the level of their resonance. This reverberating note that I've struck before, has found its deepest level of resonance. "I am alone," I say, and as soon as I say it, my struggle is resolved. I no longer carry the fear of being alone, and I no longer need to be

absolved of my aloneness. I am alone. It becomes what I am. What I am becomes what aloneness is. Aloneness is a name for life itself.

Anything I hold at arms length begins to define me more than what is true by its nature. I can't hold my arms at arms length. I can't hold spirit at arms length. I can't hold aloneness at arms length and wish for it to be gone. I can't let go of anything I hold. I'm living in the desire to hold everything. I wake up in the night and hear the train whistle. My desire, to run alongside the sound of a train with some emotion of the heart, is missing from the pleasure of its sound. As soon as I call it lonesome, my pure pleasure is lost. When my aloneness becomes the sound of the train whistle, there is no whistle. Instead of that, I wake and hear the train whistle in the night.

Virgin Territory

"How tiresome it is to feel so much," I think. And then I think what's truly tiresome is the change in the weather that pulls the blood against itself. We use the people around us to prompt us to the expression of our own bad weather. My students skip class, or they do well in class. I ache for my desired love to be the pugilist of my punching bag, or I ache to be at ease in my bed. Crystalline fogbanks climb the back of the hills.

If I were cynical, I could caricature the people around me. In the past, I used that sort of energy to fuel my imagination. It's difficult to be creative in the midst of serenity or peacefulness. A lion needs the thorn of his hunger to the taste of his prey to roar. There's a fogbank of defeated serenity and complacent peacefulness that conspire together in the fear of doing anything. The man in the hydraulic bucket, working on the Shell sign, controls his elevation from Regular to Premium. Then he raises himself beyond the height of the numbers and replaces the lights.

I sat with a young mother of seven, last night, avoiding the next poem, regretting it, even as I enjoyed her attentions and mine. My best student wrote her best paper when she was sick as a dog. She plowed on, without the internal critic that would have directed her normal mind. There's no emotion I can faithfully rely on to get me to the final line. The greatest challenge to a passionate man is to tell a simple truth. I've seen the best minds of my generation fall half asleep or go quietly and socially sane. The longer I avoid saying something, the greater power I give to it.

I welcome this missing state, in order to walk its borders from east and west, north and south, to map its interior, to crisscross its face and backside, to let this absence be my muse. I let the presence of desired love stay in place as the muse of my previous self. I let her absence become my new muse.

The Fact of Our Breathing

In my dreams, a woman was by my side, and we were so completely compatible, I asked her if she was a prostitute. I didn't get an answer. I was left with the fact of our breathing. In years of living alone, I've been given the gift of women in my dreams. They're with me and gone, never to return, never alike, always compatible with what I'm experiencing at the time. They never look like anyone I've ever known, or anyone I come to know. They rise up out of me, like Eve from one of my ribs.

I suggested to my brother that he become the man he hoped to be when the woman of his dreams had arrived. Then, when she finally appeared, she could recognize him more easily. Instead, he dresses like a woman in his mirror and calls himself his own wife. He tries to manufacture acceptance in a physical form. It's another mating ritual. There's no assurance that anything will agree with my heart. I pay attention to what's already in agreement. I answer my own prayers in stillness, with less imagination than my brother.

The woman next to me flops her hands on top of each other on the arm of her chair. The man with her raises his thumb to his eye, lifts his cup, drains it, and pops it on the table between them. She spreads her hands in a seated curtsy. He slides his palm across the arm of his chair in a languorous sweep, while her foot twists in a circle beneath the hem of her skirt. He bows deep into his belly.

Those who lead others often fill every moment with words. It comes naturally to them, but silence billows like the sea of heaven. Beneath the wonderful terror of this being here, I wonder how many people know how to scoop silence in their hands. The woman in my dreams knew how to scoop silence in her hands. It left me bewildered with happiness. I sense I'm living in virgin territory.

To Die to be Naked

A waiting room has music piped in, magazines and a television monitor, other people to look at, their diseases and conditions to imagine and identify with, one's own uncertain plight to contemplate, and experts on the other side of the door. How different that is from this. Whatever this may be, I can't say. I have deliberately drained the product placement from many of these stories, until the names sound iconic, and the people too. No names, only relationships, positions, friends, lovers, students, baristas, cops, women, men, brothers, to live and die in place, to step out of the structured living of routine, to die, to be naked.

What a lovely temptation it is to burn one's house to the ground, to destroy everything and begin again. My companion from last night has joined me, again, tonight. The only way I cannot think of her kindly, and be lost in social thinking, is to wall my forehead and squint at the ground through the cracks. I told my students to find what matters to them, or to someone. I told them to let the desire to say what matters pull the language to it. I told them to tell the truth and find the words in the effort. So much of art is the study of the artist, in biography or in the work itself. Van Gogh paints himself, until he makes himself iconic.

In a story in the New Yorker, a little girl, in France in the 1950s, writes poetry and letters that astonish the country with her wisdom, love, and innocent bravery. I couldn't put the story down. I wondered what it was that kept my interest in a precocious poet shown smiling, standing by the Seine. She was chosen to speak, by the coincidence of circumstance and blessing that comes among us when it does. It happened when she was fourteen, and then it was over. The voice left her. She became a woman like any other. She wasn't a great poet, but she was genuine in the center of who she was. She was thought of as a small, iconoclastic icon.

Last night, my companion told of walking off into the wilderness, if and when she's old and unable to live her best. She said she would do it with no worries about her children, her spouse, her community, or her family. Van Gogh painted his own portrait as a painter painting. I write poetic stories of a poet writing. Hemingway killed himself when he couldn't keep being Hemingway. The hardest thing to do, after one's age of innocence has passed, is to begin again.

A Step in the Wilderness

I realized, this morning, that my mother loved me. That hard woman, dead now, loved me as much as she was able. Within the schematics of her mind, she was as loving as she could be. I couldn't get her to love me the way I believe I'm capable of loving and being loved. I took her limitations as gospel. I don't think her heart ever grew into its full flower. I walked around my apartment, this morning, in the silence that lets the mind go deep, like a bathysphere in the Marianas Trench.

I live in a house on the edge of the forest, on the edge of the wilderness, whose unexplored regions define the range of my awareness. A sticker in a car's window reads, "The wilderness is your soul." And the soul is my wilderness. What keeps me from being at home in my soul is not its distance from where I am. Most townsfolk live here at the edge, where stories of the wilderness abound. The wilderness of the soul is the interior of who we are. The cost of the journey is in my hands. The first thing I encounter, stepping into the woods, at the edge of my civilization, is the love of my mother. One foot into the wilderness of my soul, and I feel the love she was unable to show. It was that close, all the time I was with her, and I couldn't know it, until I stepped over the line, out of town, into my own wilderness.

To Cross Over to the Living

"This is my last week," my friend said, anticipating serious surgery. He was feeling the sense of the imminence of his own death changing his attention. It has inclined him to listen to the person he's with, whoever it might be. "To cross over to the living," he says. He reads my poem back to me, and I hear him. My teacher would repeat back to the seekers who came to him for his answer to their questions the very words the seeker had just spoken. It often became apparent that the seeker had never been listened to, in his or her life. It was as if he'd never heard his own words, as if she had not even been listening to herself.

When I'm writing, the words come out. My attention is not on the words but on the thing they're meant to point to. Later, I hear them as I might if I were a friend listening and repeating the words back to the writer. I hear them as if for the first time, as if no one has ever listened to me, as if I've never listened to myself.

People listen to poets and say; “I use the same language every day. If I don’t understand what I’m hearing, there must be something wrong with the one doing the talking.” People look at a dancer and say, “I walk around all day on my legs. What’s the big deal, lifting your legs up in the air? So what!”

I’m a physical person, but I forget I am. Playing soccer, painting, and making love all remind me how physical I am. When I’m physical, I come all the way into my body. I cross over to the living. When I listen inside it, I hear my body. Everybody has a body. It’s as if I can barely speak the language of my body. We want someone to listen to our bodies, as well as our hearts and minds. Our souls don’t need anyone to listen to them. Our souls are in constant communication; we need only notice their nonstop immaculate intercourse.

Something Beyond Fear

I sat on my friend’s couch, saying how well things were going for me. “This is a time of fruition, a time of stepping forward,” I said, and in the pause that followed, in our solemn ease, I feigned a heart attack and fell dead on my side. He roared with laughter. I described to my friend my besetting problems. “That’s great for a poet,” he said, and I laughed. I feel like a coward, a man afraid of leadership, and then I simply step out ahead of myself and lead what I already am. I’m good at such things in spontaneity, but in deliberate choice, I feel the shape of fear.

My friend is having surgery. I feel as ungrounded as he does. Two men sit in a room discussing the time of their lives, talking about the time in their lives. They both sit, with all the attributes of their remarkable youth still present, with the added ingredient of a new kind of fear. They fear nothing outside the room and nothing inside the room. They fear the absence of innocent arrogance that has propelled them this far. A new kind of fear has taken the place of the absence of fear that the courage of their youthful arrogance created. An absence fills the space that their fearlessness once filled. Nothing of fear controls these men. Fearlessness did once control them, and now that’s gone, too. What a drama they witness, to see that what takes fear’s place take fearlessness’ place as well. They look to see what isn’t fear or fearlessness, in becoming something beyond them both, in both of them, in each of them.

Praise the Swollen Buddha

A man alone in a room, with no distractions to entertain him, what does he do? What does he say, if he says anything? He's a man imprisoned by his freedom. He feels the prison of the accumulated reality of his life, and he has the awareness of his being. I had my students call out a dozen words, picked, at random, from their reading. I wrote them on the board. "You know all these words," I said, "but before you write, the paper in front of you is blank. You think you don't have anything to say and no language to use, if you did. Look across these words and put three of them together." One shouted out, "Praise the swollen Buddha!" combining Buddha, swollen, and praise. Another shouted out, "Citizens don't have the nerve!" working with nerve and citizen. "There," I said, "you just wrote a poem."

Praise the swollen Buddha,
Citizens don't have the nerve.

Godot is alone in a room, waiting for no one to come, waiting for nothing to happen. What does he do? Does he talk? Does he sing and dance? Does he despair and kill himself? If there were a sign on the door that read, "Famous Hero," we might think of him differently. The hero in his room sits in his stillness. The feeling from him is a kind of rich peace. He begins to move. His movements are like dance. When he speaks, his language is like music. In the beginning is the word, and a little soft shoe. The audience wants him to talk to them. Maybe he does, you can't tell. What if he cries? What if he seems frightened? What if he doesn't seem to know what to do? What if he runs against the walls? What if he falls down in place? What if he dies? Praise the swollen Buddha, Citizens don't have the nerve.

The Impromptu Guest

In a moment of trapped panic, I leap from the precipice of my life and live another day, another day, and another, in increasing joy at the miracle of my unforeseen salvation. I fall in love with the precipitous cliff of my transformation, I want to repeat my leap in every troublesome phase of my existence, but whenever I get to the edge, I have second thoughts of easier times. It's a long way down, or out, or up, with no sure way to repeat the collision of the desperate past and the transformed present, without leaping into the unknown.

I return again and again to my beloved continental shelf, each time wanting what happened before to happen again, but some of the greatest leaps are so tiny and quick, they're barely noticeable. Afraid to lose the humility I have discovered in impromptu moments of ordinary life, I let sainthood fall where it may. Slowly, quietly, a car turns in a driveway, a light goes on. Those inside know who's arrived. They reach for the knob and pull the door wide for the impromptu guest.

The Memory of This Heart

Tired of speaking romance, I let it remain unspoken. I admit how much I have loved living my life, when it's been open to loving another. I listen, as a couple of recovering pot-smokers agree how much it made everything seem more interesting. They're nostalgic to be set free from the gray of their days. An infected tooth, unaddressed in its current condition, could bleed bacteria to my vulnerable heart. I go to sleep with an aching tooth. For want of a nail, the war is lost. Before you get to the horse, it's over.

I tell myself that missing her is what misses her. This habit of mind is to blame somebody or something. My manhood is blind, demanding its way, when a truer way is already known. Nothing I let go of is let go by a decision. It happens when holding is no longer active. Even then, the habits of mind rush to fill the vacuum with desperate pleas. I want to hold her, even if she's gone from my tender grasp. I admit the peace I feel in this aloneness. I am alone in not being alone. I am alone. I propose union with this aloneness, no matter who lives in the mind of this heart.

Riding the Trees in Morgan Park

On the way to school, I walked through a wooded hollow, with a stream running its length, in the middle of town. It was wild to my eyes, you couldn't see the houses, and I rode the trees to the ground. The stream was banked with saplings as thick as a boy's grip. We'd climb them, and the weight of our bodies would bend them. We'd ride them to the ground on the far side of the stream.

Back and forth we rode, my friend and I, or I did it alone. A tree might have flung me into space, if I was strong enough to bend it far enough. The science didn't matter. It was only boys and trees. There was no attempt to know or learn anything. When Frost stops by woods on a snowy evening,

does anyone imagine the old poet in the buggy, or is it the reader, or is it the silence of winter?

I'm nowhere in my story. Like everyone who reads, I walk a wooded path, I climb a silent tree, and ride. Once in a while, a tree would crack under the weight. It was a thrill to risk, to fall to the bank or stream, the perfect excuse to run and change clothes, in and out of the house on a dead run, with no explanation but childhood. Early wisdom learned to pick the right tree, one that matched its resilient resolve to the awakening bravado of the not yet grown.

Sapling to sapling, we were contestants of strength in simple joy, riding a whip, conquering a bow with an arrow, to reach that bending point, between boy and tree, when the tree gives, and the boy falls back to earth. Halfway up a willow, held against the sky, in the moment, bent to its breaking point.

Where There Are No Bonds

I trust myself in the deepest part of my being. I trust others in the soul we share. I don't trust in the flesh of the heart. I have the experience of our limitations. When I bare myself to anyone else, especially any woman, I risk feeling rebuffed and made to feel alone. I've chosen this mirror of myself. I open my heart to the energy of spirit. I open my heart to myself in these words. When I opened myself to her, she sat in the midst of the distance between us, as afraid of herself as she was of me. I recognized my face in hers.

My friend admits his guarded nature. I find myself at ease among the guarded, until I'm no longer at ease in our mutual distance. Unable to maintain myself at a distance from myself, I cross these commonly accepted separations. I have trusted myself to be untrustworthy, and I've trusted myself to seek to be trusted, to seek trust in others, to be open in moments of unguarded brilliance. I trusted myself to be open to trust with those who live in the trust of themselves. I have the experience of trust and distrust. I hop a flight, not blindly trusting in others, but engaging the trust inside myself as instruction for the flight.

The Courier of Stillness

Snow has fallen. It coats and crusts the visible, outside. Inside, Ray Charles

sings the fireplace of his heart. In the movies, the most isolated, desperate, lost souls have the solace of background music. The span of their time of life is reduced to a comfortable range. Time and music are draining out of my brief moment, but giving this brief moment my undivided attention elongates its reality. Lately, I've been attentive to everything but the moment of itself. I get so good at the practice of prayer, I forget to pray. This creative wonder, living in the doorway, makes me the courier of stillness. Then I'm consumed by running away with it, taking me far from its home, leaving me homeless in myself. I only have to turn around, to be home.

I pick up Emily Dickinson and wish I could free her from her churchy references. Descartes spoiled his philosophy, yoking it to the acceptable religion. Every journey of a thousand miles ought to be preceded by an attempt to invent the wheel, or the circle before that, or the sense of revolution. Before the recognition of our original revolution, someone sat contemplating the physical present. Several people sat in a circle until someone said, "This circle is turning, imperceptibly turning, toward its center."

Halved to the Sexes

Between here and there, there's nothing but here. Those traveling to the west ask those traveling to the east how the road is. I pull my sleeves down to protect my wrists from the cold breeze coming through the door. There are those whose bodies defy the shape of their anatomy. Some desire to be more of themselves than they think they are. I'm comforted by my size, when in my image of who I am, I'm small and vulnerable to those who seem larger.

My father carried some hurt he could never let out. It was done it to him, or he did it to someone. I never heard what it was. The closest he ever got was a cautionary warning. The insinuation of one generation upon another is rarely meted out in either public or private. It comes upon us from within, in the virus of our history. I have acted out my own manhood, with no clear, reliable model for it. It rises up from within, from the antitoxin of inherency.

My friend looks into others when they speak, to see the cornucopia of themselves revealed. Children ought to be told of these ways of seeing, instead of being taught to learn the filters that cloud their vision. A couple kisses at their car. Worlds collide in a kiss. A kiss brings the vast universe to meet itself in a doorway. The ancients thought the gods were most accessible

in the union of a man and a woman. I find myself in this metaphoric union of self and self, as we have been halved into the sexes.

In Romance with Momentary Eternity

In the presence of some young Japanese students, whose intelligence is the price of their passage, I accept the ease of my thinking, but without the language to share it. I enjoy the humor of this casual companionship. I like hanging out with this half dozen, even though we're near only by coincidence and not by design. As a boy, ill at ease in my differences, I was happy to go to a college where creativity and intelligence were so common they were unremarkable. We seek the company of those most like us. Now, my peers are scattered and difficult to find in any concentration.

There's an imitation of the original awakening, here and there. It seems to be everywhere, made common by the mind of man. We're good at imitating what we glimpse. We make it a giant mural of constant attention. The second I have a thought of the moment I'm living, I step back and paint a canvas of the sky. I've been sitting still for months, entertaining the opening of my awareness, introducing myself to my original self. I'm getting used to the scenery and my place in it.

I left the city behind, when I could no longer see it with fresh eyes. I had to look at it sideways and upside down to feel new in town. I've been in romance with momentary eternity long enough to become jaded. If I allow it to become a masquerade, if I fall to routine, if I let the unfathomable universe become a glass globe I kneel before, like a shrine to personal expectation, I lose its reality. I grow tired of my lover's face when I can't recognize miracles in the familiar.

Singing in the Wind

I'm dumb in my contemplation. I have no great thoughts. I am dumb. And yet I speak. Being creative comes to those who act as if what's being created will come to them. Some lucky minute or two cements the possibility that something will occur, where nothing had occurred before. The snow falls out of the darkness across the light from the streetlamp, and then gradually disappears in the darkness below, without end. My eyes fall with it, then back up, to fall again. It's a constant living birth and death of snow. From the sky to the ground, an almost frantic tumble, surrounded by darkness.

If there's a god, the proof of it is this compulsion to create something new. Variations on a theme become something new. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction become something new. Something new becomes the place where something new occurs. We are lemmings of relentless creation. If there's no god, this is the proof of it. We can't stop being what we are, even when we can't stop changing what we are. As creative as we are, we love routine and familiarity.

Born into this life on a dead run, we're unable to do anything but change, from one day to the next. We try to fashion something absolute. We're like a captain on deck in a high sea, drinking wine from a crystal goblet, planning his retirement ashore, standing on one leg, steering his ship through the storm, singing into the wind.

The Old Man With a Hat

A man is reading "A Yellow Raft in Blue Water." The title has a lovely run to it. The implication is reassuring, but the image is startling. I imagine an intensely bright color, surrounded by a deep color. The man reading sits casually arranged, with round, gold glasses on his pink face, haloed with gunmetal gray hair. The painting on the cover is more like a pale object in a gray expanse. The man's off arm is hung over the back of his chair. His hand dangles in space, like a pole over still water. He seems a serious man. I've never seen him before. I imagine he's waiting for someone and reading to fill the time.

On my other side, a couple is conversing in Russian, laughing and light, with the weight of their lives somehow present in their language. The timbre and cadence of Russian is like a somber march to the sea, with yellow rafts highly unlikely at any point on the journey.

I've always thought I was meant to be as old as I am or older. I seem to be reaching the gravity of my existence. This is a sense I was less capable of conveying at any point before now, to sit in my own weight and speak from it. I once told my brother, "We're every age we've ever been." He said, "Yes, and we're every age we're ever going to be." I wasn't so sure about that, but I've tried to become this man, and some part of me knew what was coming.

A young man comes over to the man who's reading. I see a smile on the older man's face. It's the kind of face that transforms from tragic to comic. The smile doesn't remain. An old man sits in a movie theatre, wearing a hat, until someone behind him complains. He turns and says, "I'm eighty-seven years old! I've got a right!" There's no right that comes from age, but there is age that has rightness to it.

My neighbor gets up to leave, in his white shirt and black pants, with a pager on his belt. I think he's a funeral director. He has a dour face that turns clownish. My brother and I walked around the funeral home, when our grandfather died. A man came in to the casket showroom where we were standing. "Can I help you?" he said, somberly. "No, thanks," my brother said, "We're just browsing."

These Things of Nothing

The roads are packed snow, on the verge of ice; smooth white sheets that drivers venture onto with no apparent trepidation or fear of imminent collision. I left the house feeling secure. All the crises of the recent past have receded from my list of alarms, replaced in my attention by some kind of happiness. I can't say I'm happy. I'm not sure there is such a thing as happiness that isn't a trance, that doesn't overlay the rest of how we feel. There are times and places of happiness, even people of happiness. There are happinesses, stretched moments when one feels happy, stretched not by effort, but like a yawn, like a dancer stretches, like a cat stretches, when time stretches out across itself, against its own nature.

Happiness interrupts the idea of being happy, its more popular imitator. The idea of happiness is fast among us, like the posing of an answer. The idea of happiness rides along, convincing us what happiness is, but real happiness has no rallying cry, no practice, and no holiday set aside for it. It comes on cat feet, and sits waiting for nothing else. It clears the idea of itself away, along with the idea of everything else, and replaces it with everything just as it is. These are the things of nothing that happiness brings.

Maybe a bunch of good things piled up on me, as bad things sometimes do. Maybe there's such a thing as the accumulation of happiness. I doubt it. I'm happy to acknowledge that happiness is here, for no reason. There's no art of happiness, no happy art, no happy poetry, no poetry of happiness. There is the happiness of venturing onto icy roads with no fear following it.

Our Fathers Before Us

Our grandfathers were to us our fathers freed of their weaknesses. My friend went fishing with his grandfather. I sat in my grandfather's revered presence, a big man, with white hair, smoking a cigar, on the swing on the porch of his house, or he sat in his big chair in front of his tiny black and white television. He seemed an austere and royal figure. We approach the age of our grandfathers, men we admired, despite conflict with their sons. I wonder if my son looks past me to his grandfather. My father said he didn't deserve to outlive his father. I felt the honor he showed his father in his own self-denigration.

In photos, my best friend's grandfather stands next to his other grandson, my grandfather stands next to his wife, both men stand slightly apart from others, both are seen in snowy weather. His grandfather stands with his hand on a car door, my grandfather stands with his hand in his coat pocket, the other hand holding his hat. My frail grandmother stands next to him, holding his arm.

We confirm something in each other in our passage as we drink and talk. We trade photos, but the stories we tell of are not the meat of our telling. The essential meat is not in the story or in the telling. From generation to generation, we pass on what has meat, in recognition. We're carried on as we look at these ghosts in the snow. A fire is continued, as one man looks across his life at another man, who looks across his, in the eyes of the sons of the sons, with no one between.

One Way to Skin a Cat

I sat next to her, I held her hand, and I kissed her fingers, with no need to make it true. It was true in my dream. I'm not self-aware in my dreams. Dreaming is like playing a great game of sport. I'm caught in the behavior of my actions, without reflection. In my dreams, I am the salt of my own earth. I sat watching my friend tell a story. I saw myself watching him. I watched his body telling a story. I listened to the story. I listened to several stories that came to me in my listening. Someone might say, "You don't seem to be listening," but I listen to more than one story at a time, in the thick surrealism of a day.

As he walks along, a boy genius composes symphonies in his mind, as he answers the questions of a reporter. He never edits a note. The music comes to him perfectly constructed. He has almost nothing to do with it. Beethoven's music sheets are covered with corrections. This boy is not yet a master. I pray to God, "Fuck you, God. Forgive my language. What I did before, God, I want to do better." Sometimes, when I'm driving, I turn off the radio, and I don't bother to think of anything. Living in silence was something I once thought impossible. Confined to my own silence, I discovered what an incredible resource it is. I sit in layered love, and I love her like silence.

Crossing the Ridge

Coming over the pass on the coldest day of the winter, the wind blows sheets of snow across the highway. The semis slow below their customary breakneck speed. I look out the window and think about walking in such an otherworldly environment, but if I stepped outside of my truck, I'd be in imminent peril. Cars are small rooms to die in, hurtling toward each other on narrow shelves of pavement. The woman who walks across my sight or my mind is not my escape to an ethereal environment of protected love. I told my friend I wanted someone I could crawl under the covers with and laugh about the world, and I laughed when I said it.

"This is borderline insane," I say, driving fast in the blowing wind, and we do it every day, driving faster than we know how to move on our own, flying on wheels from city to city. I'm becoming that man under the covers, enjoying the comfort of his own laughter, crossing the ridge above the valley in the bitter cold, warm as toast. The conspiracy, that I imagine, that I seek, comes over me like a blanket of humility. It comes upon me, when the belligerence goes out of my heart's desire for love, when I become one under the covers, not one trying to crawl into someone else's sheltering arms.

This Empty Seeker

No one will come to me, if I go looking in them for what I am and what I have to give. I seek what can only be found within this empty seeker. I didn't understand this simple truth until I found what I thought was missing. I look where I lost what seemed missing, and here it is, deep within this emptiness that I seek to fill. I find myself with nothing missing. Whoever comes to me, whoever I seek, is the same. Whatever is lost is found where it

first went missing. The savior I search for appears in the crack in my heart. No savior comes to heal my heart, but to show it whole.

Crossing Paths on the Prairie

The sky is a washed blue gray, the hills are white, glistening in the sun, cut by shadows, broken clouds reveal the blue behind them. In awe of being here, in nothing decided, I've been given this eye, to channel beauty back and forth across a simple knowing. We walk in the world, representing who we are, when everywhere we go is a constant foraging. We think we move the past behind as we go. Instead, we're two-way streets, four-way intersections, crossing paths on the prairie, where the sky encircles us. Wisdom tells us to be at home in who we are, yet what we tell each other ignores the reality.

A man who seems nearly broken by life, struggles to keep a semblance of himself, and his story reveals a hero's tale. When my father died, I saw his life evaporate, as if he'd been living in his own shadow. If my father had been more present in any one moment I might have witnessed, I'd have a thousand stories to tell, but he hung back, content to make a brief appearance of his life. When I commit myself completely to this flesh, I give my spirit a way to let itself be known.

The Near Corner of Endless Beauty

As a boy in school, I began a life-long attempt to be one among my fellows. I dropped the endings of my verbs. I began to swear. My classmates looked at me with veiled annoyance. They didn't like my talents and abilities, and they were at ease liking and not liking me in that way. They wanted me to be as different from them as they thought I was. I undercut every attempt they made to separate or elevate me. It further annoyed them. What did I want from them? Certainly not to be their equal. If I was their equal, they'd have to be my equal, too, and that was of no interest. I should have stayed apart, doing what I did, at a safe and comforting distance.

Certain movie actors become movie stars. They change with the change in their public role, not merely to put themselves above their contemporaries but to put themselves on the same level as our demands and expectations. We accept their elevation. We demand it. It gives us the chance to admire them, the chance to enjoy our admiration, the opportunity to envy and desire

them, to resent and denigrate them.

The roles we play are not the lives we live. The lives we live are not the life we are. The life we are is a fleeting glimpse of eternity, danced upon us by our own moments of elevation. Our elevation is that part of us that's a part of everyone. We need wonderful things to engage our wonder. We need people ready to play their roles for us. The roles played for us are the roles that play us out of ourselves into something more. We want more that we can wonder at, and to know it in our wonder, without forcing us onto the stage of that awesome responsibility. Most of us prefer to stay here in the near corner of the endless beauty of our own eternity.

Vision Has No Mirror

Vision has no mirror but in who we are. Vision looks out from within, at what has no outside. I am the mirror of my own vision. My vision is not mine. It sees from within, and I am its eyes. I seek to show the respect it's due, and I hope to show respect for the vision of others. No one assigns this duty. No one keeps track of its performance. Without vision, we may think it's some sort of sight, some way of seeing, something that can be learned or sought, like a way of looking at things. Vision is not a way of seeing, any more than inhaling is a way of breathing, and yet there are many ways to breathe.

Today is warm. The December air feels balmy. If this were a summer day, it would be cold, but today is tropical, in comparison to its fellow days, in this week of our winter. It's the last day of the quarter. I watched my students step down from the aspiring beings I imagined them to be, to the busy people they are. I'm responsible to them, as I'm responsible to the vision that compels me. My teacher said there's no inside, there's no outside. He was responsible to his vision. I wanted to cast out thought in his presence. I wanted to cast out meaning and reason and language, but he used them all in his illuminating dialog with life itself, with those of us within its endless being.

"There's nothing here," he seemed to say. "There's nothing to believe in and nothing to disbelieve." And that nothing became the loveliest thing I'd ever seen. I'd seen it before, but in his presence, I saw it for what it is. I saw, in that nothing, the clothing of vision. The emperor is not blind when he parades naked before the mirror of those who cannot see. He's seen to be

dressed in the costume of the day. In his vision, he sees only his nakedness in all its perfect beauty.

Running Away like Blood on the Sidewalk

A woman stands in the street under an umbrella of heat, smoking a cigarette in a hooded pool provided by a bar. The profit from the sale of booze is a great provider of ancillary funds. This coffee bar is almost as generous, but it can't provide what comes from alcohol. There are degrees of addiction. What we desire engineers our comfort. I've lost respect for the comfort I crave. My friend was a teacher of martial arts. His calling was a spiritual practice that others responded to and were willing to pay for. There was greater success possible, if he was to expand his practice, but he stopped, when it became something other than itself.

These small compromises are magnified by their reality. It would seem better for him, if he'd kept his practice alive, but spirit is the other side of addiction. Spirit can't be reduced and maintained or nursed like gradual death can. The end of addiction is all or nothing. The sustenance of spirit is nothing and all. I thought spirit was inexhaustible, until I discovered it draining away, without a cry from me. Then, I cried out for it not to leave me. I stopped running away like blood on the sidewalk from who I was. The faintest music in the background of life is so full some people can't help but begin to sing.

The Kiss of the Quiet Dark

My friend and I cling to each other like sailors in the sea with no recourse but the arms of the other. There's no fault in the sea. Even the ship we abandon in our separation from it sails on, without deviating from its course. I woke in the night, feeling like an outcast. There's no greater fear among us, not death or starvation, than the fear of being pushed out of the circle of our fellows. The world turns its back to your face. I have felt it, as an artist among those who say they are a friend of the arts. I have felt it, as a man rejected by a woman.

I've chosen myself to be the haven of my faith, not to have faith in myself, I have none, but to be the haven of this faith in which I'm one particular center. Everything in my animal being tells me not to abandon the pack, from which I know I'm not unwelcome. The olive branch has been extended.

It is the kiss of the quiet dark. When I left my addictions behind, I still wanted to honor the absurd failure of my drunken compatriots who stood on tables and screamed garbled obscenities.

Mutiny against the quiet dark of communal acceptance is not a sin, but it becomes another excuse to deny one's membership. Anger in the middle of the ocean is an empty noise that turns to air and water. Defiant anger comes fresh to the mouth to help one stand on the rising shelf of a new continent. Creation in the ocean is free of convention, not by its declaration, but by its nature. Creation is nothing other than the ocean speaking.

The Epitome of Itself

The hard-packed snow becomes ice. The horizon is a thin line between blue and gray. The fan in my laptop vibrates in my lap. My favorite older couple comes by. It's good to see lively elders who keep a rich virtue between life and the grave. I monitor my heart, running in the high school gym, playing soccer with thirty others. There are so many adults at the indoor game that children are finally banned from the game. One boy, a good player, shows he's good at sports, and the girls like him, too. At six, he is the epitome of himself.

To an athlete dying young in his own eyes, to an athlete being born in his play, to an athlete whose ambitions never rise beyond play, we take human models to heart or we dismiss them, while still keeping them near. The floor of any contest is peopled beyond the count. My brother was this kind of influence; my other brother was another. I was counseled well and badly. I rose and fell on the battlefield of sport. My body had certain gifts or none at all. I remember friends, those I wanted for friends, and those I fought, in love and fear: my father, my uncles, my nephew, my nieces, my son and daughter, all those who witnessed my triumphs and failures. And inside it all is the epitome of myself, the unknown who becomes known, running in a gym, listening to the still beating heart.

Portraiture

Most of nature is washed out by sun and shadow. Color photos lie about the color. The eye adjusts to the washed out color and begins to see the shadings, the gradations. It is the way people talk to each other. A famous New York artist tells how much is required to stand in front of a painting. I tell my

friend, “We’re coming alive in our aging.” My friend, as a young man full of himself went to a party in the city. The party was attended by the famous of the time, and he revealed himself to be who he’s become. If only we could see who we are being, but it takes work to stand in front of a painting, especially the painting of oneself. The glare of sun and the dimming darkness seem to diminish our acuity.

There’s no diminishment in a painting. If you stand in front of a painting, with a certain attention, with the inside of your soul opened out, everything in you becomes part of the portrait. When we spoke, she revealed the scrapings, the undercoat, the mix of wax in the paint, the bandage on the wrist, the sound from next door, her ex making wounded noises. His back is turned to the painting.

One man stands in front of a painting, and his eyes get lost. Another starts to see. One doesn’t see anything, but his ears begin to buzz. Another remembers a story he didn’t know, until that moment. One woman interrupts herself. Another draws a conclusion. The sky deepens in color, drowning out the light, and the painting is lit from within.

We Drove into Kansas

When I step out in front of myself, I see how far I’ve come. I once barely stood at my own side. I more often stood apart from myself. I think of the father I never had, who’s now here in the one I am. It’s good to see him in someone I love. It’s no good to look in others for what only comes in oneself. It’s good to see in others what comes alive in oneself.

My father and I drove into Kansas, one day, when I was a boy. He took me along on a business trip, to a nearly deserted prairie town, and he left me alone to wander the streets. Or I sat in the car. Or else I rode beside him, and I saw the lonely town, with a few buildings, and standing, as if on a hill, in a copse of sturdy elm, I wanted to dive into his body and be his flesh and bone. I was his passenger, his boy, learning the brilliant isolation of the heart. I was his son.

I long for the arms of a man long dead, never as alive as I dreamed him, except when we played on the living room floor. He was a beached whale, we three boys crawled over him, and when he stood, he let us climb his body like a tree. We laughed until we cried. These tears are his. This heaving

chest is his. This love is his. I wanted the arms of a man, who loved me, to be my arms. I climbed up inside the biggest tree in a small town. I wanted to buy the town. I was sure it was for sale.

The Drama of Rootless Eyes

He's one of those it's hard to love, except from a certain distance, and then it's easy. There's a recognition that occurs between strangers, a mutual look in the eyes of human to human. It's a silent greeting or it engages a deeper stillness. The keeper of one being sees the keeper of another. Between these riches lies the communication of our intentions and expectations. The drama of our lives is staged with winks and squints and meaningful glimpses. It would be a mistake to think he's at fault in his inaccessibility. What we call love is the drama of rootless eyes, and his are rooted in solid ground.

When we talk, more occurs than might occur for each alone. There's another kind of synergy inside one's self when one is open to the other that's called the unknown. It begins the engagement of a spirit greater than what might occur without the opening one might seek, one might allow. Life is things to do, that one does, and the rest remains a mystery. It remains a mystery until one has the experience of sitting in the presence of one's own synergy. I want that synergy to be the one walking down the street as inherent, undesired love in motion. This time of year, we unpack our Christmas sweaters, while across the snow-covered fields, some metal barn roofs are clean, and other roofs are inches deep in white.

Dying in Her Pride

My mother had a place for messages, inside a cupboard door in the kitchen. I noticed, one day, when I was looking for a glass, that she had written the word "PRIDE" in large letters. She was a woman of her religion, where pride was a sin. The note she wrote to herself became another piece of evidence in my judgment. Recently, I was reminded of the two meanings of the word. She may only have been advising herself to carry herself with dignity. When I thought that, I realized I owed my mother an apology.

Dignity is also my concern. It's posted in my own message cupboard. It's true she carried herself with dignity. It wasn't posturing. She wasn't being prideful. I have a picture of my mother wearing an ugly hat, but the picture is old, and she's not the one in the picture. I can't remember where I got the

picture. Someone took it of me. It was one of my favorite hats. I never liked wearing hats. I've never owned a hat.

I wore a worker's cap in college, along with worker shirts, jeans, and boots. A guy said to me, "Why are you wearing worker clothes? You're not a worker." After college, that next winter, I went to work in a factory. I went to work in the dark, and I came home in the dark. I wore dark colors, the day they let me go. "When you turn your head a certain way, you look just like your mother," someone said, coming out of church, one Sunday, when I was back home, taking care of her. I could see she was dying in her pride. She was preparing herself to die, offended by the indignity of death.

A Whisper in the Cacophony

Trees barren of leaves, branches like scratches on the gray plate of sky, in a warm room looking out, the delicate lines are soft on a brittle day. Painters paint spirit in their art, poets speak spirit. Language is cruel in its stripping of the leaves, generous when it reveals what remains behind. When I don't speak of love, I find it where it is, not where it isn't. When I don't call the other's name, I begin to hear the song of love that never leaves. It is the love I can't abandon, except in the fading love of my abandonment.

There's no resolution sharp enough to make anything finally known. I find spirit in emptiness. I see it in the company of others. In a warm room, the view is still, on a windless day. Spirit binds the branches like fresh paint working on bare canvas. I hold my gaze on barren trees. I see the lines breathing. The skyward lines begin to sing; the mesh of lines, the still wafting lines. I stand on the ground, my feet firmly planted, and I reach into the sky. I draw myself from a tray of color into the endless gray. In this world of harsh abandonment and smothering abundance, a persistent joy leaps the glass and warms the sky.

The Parody of Peace

I put it on the tongue of my heart to hear what my heart's been thinking. Full of juices, near to exploding, I cinch the saddle of my heart. I ride my heart like a horse. I ride my heart at night, while I sing my songs of cowboy delight. I met a man in India who said he understood his addiction - he'd drink for six months, and then be sober for six months. I met a writer in California, who suggested we divide the world between us, make ourselves

notorious, and fame would follow. I acted the equal of a master, and he slaughtered me with such alacrity, it filled my lungs and took my breath away. When my heart is tied to its desire, I'm defeated. When desire distracts me from my innocence, I trade my peace for pieces of its parody.

Minor Gods for the Godless

In the desire to control everything within their range, the works of the mind are gods for the godless and the godly, as well. Beliefs, that might offer a refuge from these minor gods of thought, are no protection. If anyone believes he has the right to destroy anyone else, destruction will begin. No belief, family, tribe, or nationality protects us from the carnage lurking in this belief.

We imagine the death of another and imagine a right from that imagination. And we love ourselves for it. We are proud to seek the death of those we might just as eagerly love. To kill is not our first thought of power, but the sanction of killing is. The tears we shed for ourselves and those like us justify what we allow in our name. This sanctioned love of our own seeks to pardon the vengeance we take on our enemy and the loved ones of our enemy.

War is not the balancing of good against evil. War is merely the embrace of war. Those who are willing to die are free, yet those who are willing to kill perpetuate war into warring without end. We take up evil to combat evil, and this practiced evil becomes the attempted liberation of our own imprisoned minds. War rearranges the world and changes nothing in the mind of war. In the landscape of the familiar prison of the mind, there's nothing but prison, except when its walls are no longer the satisfaction of our construction.

The evil in others is the ease of their construction of what we rush to build in our ongoing defense. We tear down the prison of our minds when we drop the architecture of protective imagination. When we build a gallows, we become the hangman we fear. The murderer we execute kills our reluctance to become him, and we fulfill that part of ourselves we deny ever existed.

An Army of Practiced Bravery

We seek a spiritual experience in everything we do. It's difficult for those of us who fight against this reality. Stuck in the world, our hands stick to

everything we touch. We grimace and pull ourselves away but it's no use. We fight the forms of our attachment but it's no use. The brilliant moment of our freedom has yet to appear. It's the common story. We sit in rooms of repair from the world. We seek to manage our attachment, and not its release from our grasp.

Living on the high desert in winter, in a bleak landscape, in a valley the Indians called abundant, one's hands can barely grip to form a fist. Four soldiers walk by, in matching uniforms, their stride impressive. How brave we are in the world. We protect our freedoms, knowing little or nothing about freedom. There are few warriors in an army of practiced bravery. There's no pride in dying for the forms of freedom when freedom itself is unknown. We vow our freedom and form a rebellion. We imagine a glistening utopia from the hills above the city we call the home we never leave.

I Drink With My Hands

Do you know I love you when I never give you a name? Do you know I know love when I refuse to give love a name? Once you were my god. Now I worship your absence. I've abandoned your congregation. I'm churchless. I've thrown down your chalice. I drink with my hands. The man who loves with no name for his love, with a love that has no description, with no form to admire, and no place in mind, defies the school of his fellows.

How can this bliss have no object and no center? How can this combustion have no ignition? It can't be extinguished. He falls in love, when he looks around at nothing but love. His passion is kindled by its existence. He covers his eyes. Someone might take his love for themselves. He uncovers his eyes. He doesn't take anyone else's love for his. In the presence of being present, he's happy to be rich. How does he share this wealth? There's no one from whom to receive it, and no one to give it to. This love shares itself.

Canyon Road

In the Language of Water

We don't know how to step inside our speaking to each other. We stand apart and shout across the chasm in a normal voice. I imagine a play that's like a painting, where meaning has nothing to do with it, where it's impossible for one to think during the entire drama. Walking on the beach, the sand, water, and sky have nothing to say but a soft, lapping, like language to a baby.

A soldier stands in a moment's peace, and a piece of shrapnel ends his life. Joy is like that. I bask in the random appearance of joy. A man discovers that being in love is his. He doesn't need a lover for love to occur. It's the discovery of the centuries. But he forgets it, if he can't trust himself. I need an introduction to my play that says nothing and names no one in its cast. Not a play on words, but a play of light, perhaps.

An Opening Beauty

I put paint on canvas, streak it, smudge it, scrape it, and an image emerges. The image is only the paint, but there's force in its presence. In a poem, lines are drawn from the unknown into thought and feeling. I grow tired of the machinations of conflict between sincere men. Paintings get muddy in a hurry, and recovering them from the muck isn't easy. Making a mess and cleaning it up, making mistakes and ruining an opening beauty can lead to true beauty, but some paintings die, and there's no reviving them. To accommodate myself to the world, I say it's a dance, and I find myself dancing alone. What might appear as defeat comes as a quiet reality.

A stone monument to the last war between Indians, near my hometown on the prairie, had two faces carved on the obelisk; a triumphant Sioux warrior, his face contorted in virile anguish, and a defeated Pawnee, his face a composed calm. I've chosen to be near those whose reality was near my reality but not entirely within its sphere, and the painting died. Fresh canvas requires that I forget my purpose and paint from the unknown in the image of the paint and not what I wish to see.

The Rage of Perfect Peace

A poem is not a true poem, until it becomes true for someone else, even if that someone else is one's self. My teacher seemed almost angry. He laughed and asked those who hung around him. "Are you still here?" he said. He advised his followers to go and live their lives. He was beset by those who chose his perceptions over their own. His perceptions were born of love itself. His students perceptions were identical to his and not their own. The more honest I am with myself, the angrier I become, partly because of the separation I make between myself and those around me. In the rising clarity of my dissolving identity, I continue to make myself more like my fellows. In the effort to be like others, I make myself seem unique, just like them. That's as far from who I am as I can get. This is the paradigm of our paradoxical being.

The Mirror of Population

I've seen the gain that occurs whenever I let go of something I previously had faith in. I discover the true faith beneath what I held like a talisman of fear. Fear is insurance against true faith being absent from the absolute reality. I discard what I hadn't noticed before. I cherish my passion, believing it's the character of my inherent nature. What if the middle way is the better path for the nature of my being? What if I am not the passion I've been playing like a resounding chorus of molecules? I let go of passion, without wearing the crepe of its demise, without sinking into despair.

Despair is a melancholy passion of its own. I sit in the exact center of whatever center I'm in. I sit in the circle of my fellows, without aping their needs or demands back at them. I sit in simple witness. I discover I haven't been addicted to desire. Instead, I've been addicted to my relationship with desire. I depend on that relationship, not even on its objects. I've depended on my relationship with desire to stir the source of my existence, to provide me with a life.

Acceptance is not a showy passion, but in my acceptance, I see the faces of those around me turn from being the mask of population to faces of beauty. Passion surfaces from the field of its own inherent spontaneity. I can't stop crops from growing of their own accord. The prairie and the jungle are both complex eco-systems. I'm defined by my determination not to make anything of my self. I let go of what I make of passion, and a passion greater

than I am directs my nature. I'm charged by not being anyone in charge of anything. I'm changed in seeking no change.

The Sweet Wisdom

The sun in the west breaks over the hills like lemon filling between crust and meringue. I can be in love with my life, without being in love with some part of it. The wisdom I tell myself is of no value, if I don't do this one thing, where nothing prohibits my love, and nothing stands in for its object. If love is only allowed to occur in its drive toward the other, then it has no life of its own. Then love's inherent reality is never revealed for itself. Then there is no god. If love is not allowed to occur in its inherent reality, then love is a dependency without a source. For God so loved the world, he begat billions of sons and daughters. Otherwise, he sits on high in the definition of unloving. My head fights me, as I creep closer to my home in heaven, not the one designed for me, but the one where my awareness is uncluttered with constricted thought. This cave I am is not an enclosure but the outreach of the air inside the mountain of my obstinate mind.

A Man in Clothing

Behind my truck, stopped at the light, I hear a crunch, as another car slides into the side of an SUV. The ground is covered with snow and ice. The roads are ice, packed to a sheet. The sun is brilliant, but nothing melts in this cold. My windows were icy on the inside, this morning. Language tumbles out, when I describe details or when I'm compelled. It becomes an effort when I struggle with it. Effort has a juice I work to squeeze to nectar, or bile, or quintessence, or an understanding, as if awareness is a virtue of persistence.

I read Yeats' poem "Among School Children." I hear again his struggles as a venerated elder, recognizing the image of the woman of his lifelong desire in the presence of a child. The language does that thing it does, stepping up on its own shoulders, looking out over the scene, as if to a far horizon, then back down to his worldly self, tattered and worn.

He touches the right chords, referring to the mythologies of the past and the present. He holds the image of himself out in front, like a lancer on horseback, and the language rises to the occasion. But the language is the occasion of his recognition. It rises to itself, and a man in clothing rises with it. Where young Keats was once my hero, I now identify with the older poet,

the one who lives past his early incarnations. Is it the singer or the song? I once asked myself that question of these two poets. It's still not either the singer or the song. It's the singing.

String of Pearls

What is it people want from poetry, if it isn't words to say in commemorative moments of our lives, words that give the moment its justice, a necklace to grace a lovely neck, a bright string of pearls pulled from a dark pocket? Language sings the ordinary. What do we want from poetry, but to become what we already are, in the language of what we imagine ourselves to be?

Changes in the Shoreline

The sun makes itself known like a flashlight under a sheet. I finish what began nearly three years ago, when I say, among strangers, what hurt me. I hold out the wound, until it disappears. We live among miracles, camouflaged by the things we do. When we stand up, each morning in our lives, we stand up among miracles. I drive down the street on a sheet of ice that could, at any moment, pull the rug from under my intentions. A little girl bounds from her mother to the windows and back, looking with warm, expectant eyes at any man who might be a father for her. We walk among our missing parts.

I sit across a table from my last unhappily ended love, in a financial dispute we both agreed to resolve, and the deepest, least resolved dispute is not there in that room. The deeper dispute was born in us and carried forward in our lives, and we cannot bring it to the table. The cuts on our flesh from another time have left their scars. When I leave the past to mend itself, and instead I work to mend recent tears, I reach what lies beyond the immediate. I wanted to hold her, but my arms passed through her needs like the arms of a ghost. I go someday wrong, when I go looking for wrongs to right. I right myself, when wrongs are forgiven. These wings change the wind in a past we can't remember. These footprints in the sand change the shore before we were born.

We Go to War in Words

The noise from the new renter was too much to ignore. I banged once on the wall. I got earplugs from a drawer. Finally, the noise was too much. I turned

my room around. I moved my pillowed head to the other side of the room. I rearranged the furniture. The next morning, I woke from a deep sleep in a much more attractive room. It was more settled than the one I had hastily arranged when I first moved in. I wanted to knock on her door and thank her for the unintended sequela (a lovely word from a lawyer's language).

I imagine the defense made by a man accused of overreacting to someone else's hurtful language. The prosecution says, "Sticks may justify stones, but words can never hurt anyone." The defense replies, "But look at what happens in this courtroom, as it does in every court, every day. Words are used to condemn a man to punishment, to convince us to authorize violent acts, even death. We go to war in words. Words take their effect in our actions. I can effect the movement of objects with my words, "Please pass the salt." "Take the prisoner away." I can alter the perception of reality with words. "The sky is falling, the sky is falling."

The incoherent, unending nasal noise from beyond the wall drove me to fits and then to rearrange how I live. Alan Ginsburg spoke his fine poetry in a certain voice and people came to believe they were in the company of greatness. His poetry, spoken in a certain voice, raised the voice of their ears to a consciousness of greatness. The greatness in their ears heard itself spoken.

His Helpless Perfection

My shoulders shake like oxen shed their flies, their sweat, their yoke. My throat constricts to let loose a shout. I sigh a secret language. I touch my mouth with signs. My forehead dances a message. I wipe my eyes with words. Each time something of worth appears in this life, I act out the reality I become. All the houses of my town are emptied, as all my citizens come to the central square. My father would retreat to the basement, when it was time to say goodbye to someone he loved. His way of loving was to leave it unexpressed. I take up these habits, having no habit for them. He couldn't show how much he loved anyone, so he left everyone. Whenever they left, he was left behind, in hiding.

I teach myself, in teaching what I wasn't taught. I teach myself in teaching what I never learned. I learn by walking in not knowing. My life is a constant arrival where it's capable of always having been. I learned everything my father taught me. I learned everything he couldn't admit he

was teaching. I learned what he didn't know he knew. I learned the secrets his ignorance tried to mask. I learned his unseen self. I became the son of his terrible failures. I became the son of his helpless perfection.

The Evanescent Has No Chronicle

Snow melts, ice melts, water pools, desire goes away, but not its object. Instead of desire's warm apprehension, I feel the empty expanse of its failure. My forehead tightens to a knot. Maybe it's barometric. The sun is out, burning the frigid to florid. I gave my poems to another woman. Shakespeare compared his love to a summer's day, and then erased the praise, knowing love's transience, believing his poem the only lasting reality. His poem is more about death and poetry than love, yet in our love of the poem, we transit love to the language of love, then to the unspoken nature of love itself.

Evanescent love has no chronicle, but the chronicles of love are thought to last. The poet says his love can't be kept or described, but its occurrence can be clothed in words. We can love the fabric of the words in love's place. A poem of praise to a love that has its substance in time, like the beauty of a flower, becomes the vase of its love with the flower painted on its porcelain.

A small boy, living without a father, looks in my eyes, and some fathering is given and taken in love. These words are a token of that moment, given and taken in similar love. We fashion and hold these totems to love, across the distance between the moments of love's presence. We know what we love is fleeting, but love is not, and we are its carrier, from flower to flower, in words told of the flower's brilliant beauty.

The Servants of Our Ignorance

My teacher was aware that few of his students rose to the occasion of the freedom he personified. They gathered in rapt attention to witness the brilliance of his stillness, the sun bolts of his presence. "Come here," he might have said. "Come to here in who you are." Many seemed to say, "Yes, we hear you. You say for us to come. We hear what you say, and we come closer to you, until it's time for us to go. We go, but we will remember the wonderful language of your spirit."

His own beloved teacher's twenty years of silence were called his finest teaching. Dedicated students came to hear him, when he finally spoke. He told them of the center of their own being. And they said, "Yes, we hear you. But what should we wear? What foods should we eat? What prayers should we say?"

"Be as you are," he said. My teacher looked at familiar faces and said, "If you have a burning desire to be free, you don't need to be with me." When someone would call his name and speak to the core of their awareness, tears would come to his eyes. All he wanted was for his words to dissolve in the hearts of the suddenly free. I imagine him alone, in a room crowded with the spirit of our common being. No one can say they're free if they think they're less than someone else or if they think they're more. It's easy to look at any chosen teacher as the master of our ignorance or as the servant of our ignorance, and then forget the knowledge we seek is ours in equal shares of clarity.

The Vestigial Twin of the Real

T.S. Eliot said that people don't care for too much reality. I sat in my new apartment, watching one of my favorite movies, eating my favorite fried chicken, and I broke a tooth. The pain became overwhelming. It was a Sunday. There was nothing to be done about it. I fell into my fear. I felt the loneliness I'd been feeling since moving away from my partner of the previous five years. I felt the sadness that I felt whenever I felt alone. Sadness opened the door to fear and then to a nameless terror. And finally, beneath the terror, peace occurred where it had always been. I lost my fear of reality. I saw what lies beneath all its terrors. Beneath terror, beneath everything, lies the natural peace of our being in life itself. It was the peace that isn't even a feeling, but it is the reality beneath the real, and feelings of peace arise from it.

I had always sought immediate relief in my world of relative realities. Whenever I felt lonely, I would seek a companion. That one time, I did nothing but remain in my pain. My broken molar was a trigger to discover what lay beneath who I was being. It was similar to the night a bully provoked me to fight. I was not a fighter, but in that moment I discovered a calm beneath my fear. Fear became my less feared reality. Even so, the self, that holds these fears tight, still lives.

I saw a cow on exhibit at the county fair when I was a boy. Half of another cow was protruding from it, like a vestigial twin. My fearful twin had been a part of myself that wants to be afraid of the greater reality. The vestigial calf becomes master of the living. It demands we not look at the real. If we do, the vestigial will become dead to our use, protruding from the greater reality.

A Neutral To Be Desired

In the course of a life's day, fortunes are reversed. The bleak and barren become lush and forested. The luxurious becomes lean. I almost ran into a man who almost ran into me. He was angry, getting out of his truck. I apologized for my part in our near collision, and he apologized for his. I watched some old familiar behavior of my own in the self-contradicting dance of another. I kept talking to him, until he revealed the warring factions I've seen in myself. We parted with handshakes. I don't think he's finished with what drives him, for and against himself.

In the boxing ring, there are neutral corners, in cars, a neutral gear, in dress, there are neutral colors, in this matter of self-mastery and self-defeat, there's a neutral that encompasses everything else. This reminder of myself came bouncing out of his truck like a prizefighter, a rooster, a sparking wire. The cloudiness in his eyes and his electric hands turned to an image of unresolved desires. He was a gentle sort in an ungentle mind, brighter than his own answers. He called me gracious. I saw grace in him and said so. His girlfriend is someone I know. I thought about warning her of the uncertain future, but I don't know enough to know the good of saying anything. In the course of a day, lives are reversed. What seems right, in this dramatic moment, may be more right in some other moment of its unmet self.

The Good of Useless Prayers

A place of calm beckons in the midst of difficulties until it becomes a complacency. There's a fierce tranquility in facing adversity until it becomes a shadow of itself. One step leads to a half step, then to a stasis, then to a falling away from being alive. Let me not slide to my demise in search of an ease. I've died many times and come back, without the memory of my dying. This death and birth has no history. When I take fear out of reality, what must be done can be seen.

I scattered my father's ashes in the river that ran by our house, and the river ran away with him, I go to the spot on the bank where I last saw him, he tells me to be calm, there's no good in this anxiety. He no longer lives, he's become what he was before he was my father, before he was himself. I put my father in the river, where he wanted to be, but he comes to tell me to stop this concern. There's so much pain in the world, we don't know what to do but complain and invent painful and pleasurable ways to end the pain. I want my father with me, but he wants to be the river. I seek advice, but my father won't answer me. This grief and grievance has no grant, but it helps to call his name.

Ordinary Drawings of Ordinary Objects

The nightly drop in temperature turns the thawed roads to ice. Another former president has died, and in the turning of pages, we find more pages to turn. Old kings come round again. We see their faces in our leaders, as we churn out the future of the past from the past of the future. Beneath the showy passions of life, lies the passion that's ignored for the commotion on the surface, until history shows the folly of its repetition. Every time Hamlet considers revenge, he takes revenge. Every time he dies, he dies.

I make small drawings for my daughter's daughter, who lives halfway round the world. She likes black ink drawings of ordinary objects on white paper. I put my pen to the surface, and a world is born. Lines become houses, the edge of hills, a road in the center. The road reappears in the distance on the side of a mountain. A small car climbs the street to the top, before plunging down the other side. There's a tree on one side, a cat on the other. There's a bird on the wing. One house has a door. The other house has two doors and a window.

So much happens when so little is intended. The antenna on the little car, the curl in the cat's tail, the snow on top of the mountain. My granddaughter may send her own grandchild simple drawings. My grandfather put his thumb in his fingers and said he had my nose.

This last president who died was known for his pardon of the criminal he succeeded. In a photo taken in his room in the Forbidden City, the former president wore striped pajamas and moccasins while conferring with his advisors. His wife was a dancer who became a champion of those addicted to alcohol. He was a football player on a championship football team, who

became a caricature of awkward clumsiness.

Sweet Deceit

Cursed with the energy of spirit in a body, I gradually weaken myself to get along with others, turning reality to a shared conversation of approximations. Desire to love and be loved coaxes sweet deceit, to wear a popular face, to think well of others. When we see others' deception mocking our own, we refuse to condemn our mutual diminishment.

Desire colors the complexion of those I want near, and worse, desire acts on me like an ownership, as if, in my desire, I presume rights over others. Desire would give me property I ought refuse when I have no right to its deed. I'm propertied in boundless spirit when I covet no other. From that open vantage, I see the compact of social ownership that overvalues the fields of my neighbors, and undervalues their essence. In market with each other, we raise crops that starve the source and fail to feed the kind.

In the Circle of My Narrowing Eye

Desire, the driving force of my attention, gets me to an intoxication that ignores the real. No addiction goes away, but it goes the way of all addictions, and in its final failure, one sees the way free. The vision of intoxicating desire leaves the periphery unseen, when I might I see beyond the circle of my narrowing eye, greater than the magnification of desire. What comes into an open lens is attention to what's not held in exaggerated focus. The object of one's desire reduces to its true size.

When desire raises its swollen head and declares its domination, what feels like an insult to the other, is a greater insult to one's own sight. Desire is the face of passion that wants to be all that passion is, but bedrock passion threatens superficial desire, until desire rages. Spirit that turns from obsession to acceptance invites rebellion from the now neglected mask. One's façades build and fall away, but I don't go away from what I am. To let go of this deceit is to stand more clearly alone, in the company of everything. It is to see each tree, and the forest as well. It is to stand alone in the presence of overwhelming beauty.

I Speak of an Inner Landscape

I speak of an inner landscape, that's no less real for seeming less real. I choose not to mistake reality for what we name as real. I look at a thing that's not a thing, to describe it into gentle proximity, so its reality can be seen. I see a doorknob, across the room, as big as a grapefruit. I see the head of a screw as large as a saucer. I see a face, drawn larger than itself, that becomes a face not drawn but drawn on. These portraits enlarge to an arrangement of revelation. I see something within, become a face, to see it from within, not as a fiction crafted from our joy and shared pain, but to reveal itself real. My unseen self has no physical being, but this forensics of the unseen uncovers what seems less real in its camouflage, until what lies beneath easy appearance, is lifted into recognition.

I map the character of energy, as spirit sits for its likeness. I see beyond the visible, not in projection but in revelation. I tell the story of my flesh, to tell the shape of its source; a reality of the real that inspires and informs the portrait. A beast, pulled from the muck, cleans its face to a startling beauty. The fanciful beast of my fears becomes a creature of courage. I'm mistaken, at a distance from myself, to think I sleep in darkness, when I fall awake to the dawning light.

Pieces of Limitless Ceiling

Chairs are raised pieces of floor that move all over the room. The skull is a lowered piece of limitless ceiling. The sky is a raised piece of my heart. My heart is a lowered piece of sky. The earth is a gathering of what looks solid from the sky. The solid parts of sky are a disbursement of everything we walk upon. One day, in the depths of despair, I saw a twinkle in my own eye, and it became difficult to maintain my attitude of desperation.

I always assumed I'd live to a ripe old age. Then I had a heart attack. Today, I felt again the self-assurance I carried before the shock of my mortality. Those years are still here, waiting for their fulfillment. The law enforcement officers I sit among tell each other mundane stories of their lives. The mutual affection in their eyes is a delight. I've been in a certain kind of war for so long that my compatriots have dwindled to a scattered few.

One famous guru died before he got the chance to know another guru with whom he felt an affinity. Both were voracious readers, private men

surrounded by multitudes, both men were held in reverential esteem. Lacking a friend like kin, one of them said it was his only regret. My friend has been away. I miss the camaraderie we discovered when he sat down at my table in a café in the city. I miss it more than the budding closeness I felt with a potential lover. I might have tossed my friend over for a lovers' bond, because I dreamt that sort of love greater than the one I knew. I look in my despairing eyes. I see the twinkle in the eye of a friend I can miss without missing anything. When nothing is missing, it's hard to conjure the misery of missing it.

My Brother Runs Near a Sunny Beach

The ground is frozen, as if the ice were centuries old, layer upon layer, like sheathes of opaque facade. Walking is a careful venture. Getting to the car an event. Going in a store becomes calculated. Arriving becomes an accomplishment of a multitude of fears and feats. This frigidity affects who we are, in how we are. In the world, another dictator has been put to death, so far from our lives that it barely merits comment.

In Honolulu, my youngest brother runs near a sunny beach. My hands tighten in a grip that's not my own, I imagine it may be the onset of arthritis or I'm being frozen from within. My lyrical ears want its cause to be the absence of romantic, physical love. Whatever occurs is the grist for whatever mill that grinds, in whatever moment of time I live. It's been cold long enough for the cold to become what operates in everything else.

An empathetic teacher told an earnest man that his physical pain needed to be taken care of before he'd be free to recognize his truest self. My brother runs near a sunny beach. Here, the sun diffuses to a crystalline gray. This last summer I lived in a torrent of desire. It was a fire I danced around and through. It could have been the summer sun that heated my passion. We are simple creatures, living in the temperature of our lives.

A Sleek Purple Car

A sleek purple car pulls to a stop, with tinted windows that hide the occupants. The lines of its design are the face of uncompromising power. No one moves inside the car, until a hand appears at the driver's window. A dumpy man in sweat clothes emerges, holding a soda can. His passenger, who I imagined was a child, turns out to be another man, also dressed in

sweat clothes. They talk together, as if they've just met and are just now renewing a longstanding acquaintance.

I came into this town with the bravado of a stranger. Now I think it may not be so easy to stay true to what I bring. Every place on earth feels like the center of reality. Its self-definition becomes the constant of its self-centered reality. On the road between not this and not that, an opportunity emerges. On the road between the last thought and the next thought, lies the same opportunity. The binding ties of practiced thought are let loose in the moment between thoughts.

In this cold, one can move to a warmer climate, bundle up, go inside and turn up the heat, or consume heat-producing calories. There are many ways to confront the cold. The most promising of my remedies for breaking the grip of this boa constrictor of thought, is to shed the skin of my snaky mind. Then I suddenly realize the goose is out of the bottle. The problem I thought was a problem is no longer a problem. The goose of an imagined problem is my gift to the boa constrictor of my imagination. Another unresolved problem is solved in the dissolution of its solution. Holding onto a problem because one respects problems, is a purple car, occupied by chatty men in sweat pants, behind tinted windows, drinking soda pop from cans.

Spinning in Control

I was invited to a place that had no interest for me, other than the chance to see something happen that probably wouldn't happen. In order to go, I would've had to act out some trumped up interest in some other reason for my being there, so I didn't go. As soon as I decided to drop the deception that I was prepared to practice, I felt my dignity return. By doing nothing in place of doing something I couldn't honor, I was restored. Desire would have left me in a briar patch trying to smell its missing roses.

Out of This Time

Out of this time of apparent deprivation and scarcity, there's a harvest of perception and a husking of the unnecessary from its fruit. In this dark and cold time, I notice myself laughing spontaneously. I experience the exchange of tiny kindnesses with ordinary strangers.

If you sit in one place long enough, with no ambition to control what comes, the entire world will stop by for a visit. Everyone sits in the center of the universe, but generally, it doesn't begin to revolve, until one learns to do nothing, in the most constructive way possible. Here at the center, there has to be nothing but center. If one starts to add to it, it begins to lose its centrality. It begins to wobble, to spin out of control, to go off in tangents, and into the ditch. The center is particular. "Thou shall have no other gods before me," the center says, "and don't bring your other gods around here without their party hats."

An Ancient Dragon of Heartbreaking Deceit

In the course of a day, we're transformed. Each day is a day of transformation, but our miracles go unnoticed. I was frightened in the world, every day, to be newborn in my skin, until I learned to imitate my familiar self, from day to day, so I could be recognizable to others. But the only recognition that matches reality is to look inside transformation and see its inherent bone structure and not the one we invent for ourselves. I went to a reunion; curious to hear what had happened to everyone I knew and those I didn't know. I wanted to meet new people in the familiar shape of old friends, but we gathered in groups that were defined by the patterns of the lives we left behind. The groups hoped to see what no longer existed. The familiar is an ancient dragon of heartbreaking deceit.

Staying for the Music

Someone said, "You're a poet. How romantic!" "It's my reality," I said. "There's nothing romantic about it." A secretary falls in love with a saxophone player, and two weeks, or two months, or two years later, she leaves him, complaining of the same behavior that had attracted her in the first place. Unchanged, the saxophonist is dumbfounded. This business of being a poet has been a slow and constant draining of the romantic. I've become as much a scribe as a saxophone player, but I stay for the music.

It's been said that the writing of the scholars of the sacred, is more sacred than the sacrifice of the martyrs. Martyrdom is more practiced in the minds of the many than true scholarship is in the hearts of the few. Martyrdom and scholarship have their imitators. There's no analogy for the compelling urge to practice either one. Long after romance has lost its romance, one is compelled by the music of its naked reality. Its reality is the music of what

remains after the band has gone home and before the band arrives. The music of its reality is in the air not the mind.

Resolution Among the Artists

There's a backup in the mountain passes. Cars come in, covered in ice, this first day of the new year. I had dreams of the peculiarity of artists, how difficult it must be for anyone to want to find a place for them. They have to find their own place. There is no place for them. As a poet and artist, I look like a normal person. This gets me thinking that everyone else is living in the same reality. The confusion is reasonable. I say I'm compelled by transformation, but I'm compelled by the nature of being itself. I compelled by nothing, in its purest form.

I look for definition where there is none. I look to define nothing, when nothing is the definition of my inherent nature. Even as I look for a definition of the indefinable, the indefinable stays undefined, even in its definition. Where could there be a place for such a definition? There is no place. Artists have to find themselves at peace, without a place. At the beginning of every question is the one asking the question. At the beginning of the one asking the question is the answer.

In the Guise of Autobiography

When a woman talks to me, I politely engage an old assumption, based in the reptilian brain of my ancestors, that all females are to be mated as soon as possible. This woman says she's in one profession, wanting to be in another. There's a light in her eyes, thinking of what she might do. I have, in the past, thought I needed to fall in love with others, the same as wanting another profession. Carrying the dream of it is better than carrying the weight of one's dissatisfaction. This greed I have to be in love is utilitarian. It gives a name to my nameless self. My friend recommends I masturbate with no image in mind but my own physical presence, but that's only a deliberate imitation of what every boy feels when testosterone has taken control of his body.

There are concerns that run ahead of us in succession. In our teens, it's the physical, when the body seems to make better choices for itself than the mind can. Athletes and lovers are governed by a nearly divine physicality. In our twenties, we're governed by the psychology of the mind and learning the

world. In our thirties, we're focused on the emotional body and the experience of its entanglements. In our forties, we pursue the spiritual self and the sense of oneself beyond oneself. These forces continue in lessening cycles of domination, until they are spent in the whole, and nothing dominates us but the entirety. The appearance of this particular woman triggers my inclinations, but this is only that same old inclination, in the present time, and I've already done enough of that, in the pretense of making an autobiography of this life.

The Second Day in Heaven

The second day is the first day without the same fascination. It seems impossible to believe that the new person I was, or the new person I met, that first day, is still new to me. Everything dies on the second day, unless I let dying die with it. They said, of the teacher-saint of our religion that he was human as well as he was eternal, and then the human self is forgotten. This overlay of man and god is difficult to fathom.

There's no simple separation to make it clear. Dualities are easier to embrace. One can move between them, like between one's separate mother and father. The first day in heaven breaks like no other, but the second day comes up like repetition. The second day is the same as the first, except one's mind is stuck in time. We're inclined to repeat any second day as if it's nothing new.

A father moves around the table to take his daughter's picture. She resists, turning away from his light. No matter where he moves, her bright eyes go blank. Then she agrees to his request. Unsmiling, she turns to the camera and grips her juice box in her tiny fist. No one's ever had his or her picture taken. Every picture is of someone else. Tourists take pictures of each other. No one captures the moment.

A man's pictures of his recent trip abroad fail to convince him he was ever there. This poem is another bright artifact. An ancient bowl in the museum, once infused with divinity, is drained of its sacred power. Over time, it's become a bowl, and nothing more. I pick up the first day's bowl, on this second day in my ordinary heaven, and the first day is gone, but not the one who invests it with the divine.

This New Horizon

If you look far enough, the horizon has no end. Its demarcation plays cat and mouse with limitations. I find myself in a long slog. The nation imitates my slog with its own slow slog. I'm a patriot in the same sacrifice as the nation. It's crept up on both of us. It started some time back, and I could put a starting point to it, but it's never that certain. I took care of my aging mother, even though it was difficult. Then I entered a relationship that went bad from the start. I needed to do what I did, in the first instance, and I kept following the same impulse in the second instance, when I didn't have the same need.

I believed in my commitment, both times. It's hard to separate the loyalty for one's decisions from the decisions themselves, when confusion clouds the picture. Now I'm reluctant to stay in any practices that have gone awry, but in the midst of this, I see a greater good. After a heart attack, I said I'd been young until I was old. I finally felt my mortality. I began to live in the skin of my age. I began making choices that carried the weight of my age. Aging has its own teachers. The actions of the mature run the same risk as those of the young, but a new kind of boldness enters. There comes a time to begin what ends. There are beginnings after any change. One does them well or not well, and some endings become ended by our beginning them.

In the Burgeoning Morning

Mortality is a cruel joke. This consciousness cannot survive physical death. It's an astounding denial of a virtue when we think our minds will survive our death. Spiritualities and religions promise our survival as conscious beings, to salve the hurt of this awful fate. I wake, during the night. I become conscious of dreams that otherwise would have passed unrecognized. The nature of thinking creates this honor and this horror of the death of consciousness. Nothing in being cares about what seems so tragic and unreasonable as the loss of the mind's consciousness. This conscious mind is an occurrence in a body of energetic cells, and the cells die easily enough, but energy transforms into other forms of energy.

In the awakening morning, I fall into a kind of joyful currency. This life sentence is a gift of being guardian to the amazement my attention allows. For the second time, I go to school and teach a class of sentient beings. I begin to learn their names and faces and hear their astounding stories. I ask them about their best and worst memories from their schooling. One student

stood up to an autocratic teacher. One was sick for months and came back to a welcome she hadn't expected. One wasn't in school until sixth grade, and it became her favorite year. Existence is a varied joy. Everything after that recognition compounds the miracle. There's no ordinary avenue to mention the fundamental reality. It goes so commonly without saying.

False Eyes

I wrote another poet, an old friend, who was an even older lover; "I've kept you in my thoughts as something other than a friend, harboring romantic fantasies with no connection to how you have acted toward me. It's a disservice to who you are in your reality. Persistent romanticizing of others I've known is not successful, even though I've used it to fuel and focus my energy. Reality is a more reliable fuel and a sharper focus. I'd rather let go of what's not true and doesn't serve me.

Without cause to romanticize, I'd rather see you in clear light. I apologize for this habit of mine. I thought romanticizing this life had some use, but it's clouded my being with others, and I want clarity. I want to be true to who I am, in the way I am. The love of the core has no coming and going. It doesn't need the false service of imitators. One who comes to know the nature of love loses the romance of its façade. I can no longer admire the false face I put on who you are. It puts false eyes in my head."

A Thing I Thought Was Slight

They're making a new movie of an old adventure. The actor playing the lead was once a young hero, but now he's older, and so is his character. My friend was a celebrated dancer in New York. His wife now displays a photo of him in full flight for her class in gerontology. She says he's trying to do it again. He says our bodies speak each day in the same language that keeps us familiar to our surroundings. It's difficult to change patterns, even in the way we sit and stand. I said, "I miss the floor. Kids go to the floor all the time." Then to illustrate, I fell down to the floor in a crash. My friend's awareness gave me permission. In order to be different from our habitual selves, we have to speak in awkward and uncomfortable ways. I begin to live without romance, but within its source, that knows no desire or fear.

Without the romance that imbues the fearful into extremes of constraint and dreams of escape, living is beheld, closer to what life is, and not what is

imagined in airless rooms of alternating desire and dispute.

My friend performs a practice of awareness in his body. Every set of muscles is like a home in his village. Each one needs to be opened and allowed to breathe. Each muscle has character and voice. Each muscle needs to speak in its own voice or it begins to tighten to complaint and pain.

I wrote a friend and apologized for romanticizing her, for coloring her reality with my romance. I've been holding onto a thing I thought was slight. I knew any romance with her was absurd, but I held it, as if it were a slight thing. My hands were not open and empty, and then they were. I released a thing I thought was slight, and a great room opened up in my heart.

In the Moment of Devastation

My friend told me of a couple who lost their child and how the loss devastated their lives. As he spoke, I imagined a man driving down the road, when he sees a car coming in the other direction. If he stays on his path, the other car will drive off the road. If he adjusts his path, the other car will continue on its way. He does nothing, and the other car goes off the road into deep water. He leaps from his car and dives to save the occupants. He becomes a hero. I asked, "Isn't he as much a hero in the first instance, even though there's no catastrophe?" We depend on these catastrophic events to mark the momentousness of our lives.

I told my friend about a father and his three sons I had seen together. The smallest moment may affect his boys for the rest of their lives. A hard look in the father's eyes at one of the boys could be the beginning of a life of destruction. My friend suddenly leaped from his chair and told a story of his angry and autocratic father. He and his brother had borrowed their father's hairbrush, just before they returned from a family trip. Once they were on the road, they realized they'd forgotten it. They were afraid of a maelstrom of anger and blame. It was only a hairbrush. They were only seven and nine.

After that time, my friend became defiant, rebellious, and sought love elsewhere. The smallest moment has great power. To attend to the moment is not to deny the events that overwhelm the moment, but one's attention to events should never deny the moment. In the attention of our ordinary breath, the moment and the event are the same, and devastation comes when it comes. If his father had paid attention to the moment, what occurred in that

moment could have been made small and lovely.

A Certain Pregnancy

She and I were pregnant with love for nine months, and then nothing came of it. There was no abortion, no baby, no miscarriage. Nothing came of it. It was neither concluded nor continued. I came to believe I was the only one in love with the baby, the only one who carried the child, the only one who was pregnant with what seemed to swell us both. With all my penetrating gestures, nothing happened. There was no delivery except the one of my perception.

A man next to me carries on a conversation I'm privy to with no recognition of my participation. He's talking loudly to someone not present, and I'm included as a listener without his including me. We've become familiar with similar private exchanges between people who have no use for privacy. There are few surprises in these everyday revelations. Most of what we say to each other is interchangeable. We draw from a common pool of concern, at no loss to communication. When he sat down, he didn't acknowledge my presence but turned his chair slightly away, as he made his call. I'm tempted to put my feet in his lap, as if he's not here, but I doubt he'd get the analogy.

I was often tempted to put my feet in her lap, and when I called out to her, she responded. When I was talking to her, the talk was rich and resonant, but the line went silent. There was no baby, and no one was pregnant. All this talk of birthing is metaphoric, but as long as there was the cribbing of a baby, its birth was potential. We were together in the fullness of that potential. The potential of love and life is potent, but only for a time, and then we mourn the unborn.

The Mushroom Fields of Tinsel Town

I sit atop what once was a mushroom field. When this part of town by the freeway became commercial, the locals called it Tinsel Town, because of all the new lights. At this changeable surface, I am what occurs. What occurs is what I am. It's good to know what lies beneath what occurs. Things that shame me, that I once thought were my virtue, don't leave me by becoming something changed by my behavior. I am the mushroom field beneath my place of business. In this nearly empty room with recorded music, I live and do my work in the theatre of a rapt audience of one becoming another.

In India, after writing, I would walk to the copy store. It was a small room in a small building by the side of the road. A man would put my papers through his Xerox machine. It cost me a few pennies, and the journey to the store was one of my daily pleasures. A few years ago, an art teacher, in his eighties, finally consented to write a book of advice to artists. He said painting was nothing more than putting one spot of color next to another spot of color. I have to occasionally remind myself of the genuine, absolute, perfect, and pure physical joy I feel in the simplest of things. I live in the mushroom fields of Tinseltown, putting one word next to another.

My Mother's Chair

My brother's is upset with the cost of our mother's cremation, three years ago. Our mother was friendly with the skeletal woman who ran the funeral home. The woman, several years her senior, was still able to travel widely, while our mother was confined to her chair. There's a lot to be said for a chair, no matter how rich you are. When anyone sits down, it's likely to be in a chair, and there's not much difference between chairs. When one goes for a walk, it's generally in a pair of shoes, whether you pay five dollars or a thousand dollars for them, they're pretty much the same.

Just before she died, I did a painting of my mother's chair. Over the years, it was the only painting I'd done that she loved. She dismissed the rest, but she loved that painting. She said so, many times over. It was a portrait of her last refuge, her final vantage point, and her home base. When I was painting the chair, I had no idea I was painting the love I felt for my mother. There was no other way to express it, no other way for me to feel it. The love between us was not the medium of our being together. She was a practical woman, and that kind of behavior was the way she showed her heart to everyone.

Over the years of the rest of my life, I'll think of my mother and speak of her in ways I haven't spoken before. The fruit of buried love is dug up like potatoes, or roots, or treasure in a metal box. Or it surfaces on its own, like artifacts from a tribal ground in the shifting of the tectonic plates. My brother loved his mother, too, but she was cruel to him in her slights and dismissals. Her indifferent behavior was nothing more than she expected toward herself. She got a full treatment from the funeral home.

My brother thinks we could have gotten it for less. Our father was frugal, like his sons. My brother means no slight to his mother; he's just looking to

save a buck or two. He says her body could have gone straight to the flames, without the formality of the fanfare.

The Distillation of Accumulation

Reaping the harvest of a lifetime is a curious phenomenon. After repeating oneself in a thousand ways, what remains is a tincture, a solution, a homeopathic residue. It has value one didn't imagine. This era began a few years back. Each day, on my younger brother's bicycle, on my daily round-trip ride, I went to write in a café bookstore in Honolulu. One day, in the bookstore, I walked past a long section called "Self Help." As I passed the rows of books, I thought, "Somebody ought to write a book called '101 Ways to Avoid Reading Self-Help Books.'"

Then I thought, "You're a writer. Why don't you do it?" I went back to the café and wrote forty sections. I rode to the beach and wrote twenty more. I rode back to the café and wrote forty more, adding the 101st the next day. When someone asked how long it took me to write the book, I said, "A few hours...and fifty years." It was the distillation of accumulation.

There came a time in this country when age was thought to be of less value. The culture was moving too fast for one's knowledge to keep up with it. The young were suddenly considered wiser than the old. Now, we're about to be overcome by a generation of the old. What may be lost could be the innocent, the naïve, and the untested, but there's a vast storehouse of distilled wisdom, at our ready disposal. The two are not incompatible. When I was young, another poet said to me, "You're not telling us what you know." I was certain I knew nothing, but I began to open up that innocent nothing. It astounded me with its breadth and depth. Innocent nothing is the source of wisdom, and accumulation is an indicator of its consistency.

Many Years Ago in a Bar One Night

I watched an interview with an actress I admired. I wasn't disappointed in her, any more than I'd been in her career. I didn't dream myself in her embrace or her in mine. This seemingly harmless pastime of the imagination does its damage to the reality in which it's inserted. People passing by don't clutter the path, but those we try to hold onto in order to fill our landscape change its transient beauty.

Many years ago, in a bar one night, I spoke about a girl I'd been with, and her brothers, in the bar at the time, came up to me, to talk it over. They heard, in my casual banter, an ownership that disturbed them. I said I was sorry and began to notice the language of an attitude. I felt no ownership, but the way I described her was possessive. We want to own something in this life, even if it's only the way we think about things and others. I own nothing, I possess nothing, nothing is mine, and nothing belongs to me. Even knowing that, my words in the world want to deny the reality. I want to say these are my words.

My mind wants to say, "I am the owner of these words. I am the owner of the thoughts these words represent. I am the owner of anything that comes to me in thought." This is the way the mind wants to own the world. These are the thoughts of control and fear that govern the mind. These are the thoughts of a mind that hasn't surrendered to its own greater reality. Desire is another method of control and fear, in a mind that hasn't surrendered to its reality.

My words in the world are the artifacts of imagination in the mind of thought and feeling. Words leave the garden of their Eden, nursing the separation that then breeds a lost ownership. My occasional lover's brothers came to me and said, "You don't own this garden. If you think you do, you will never know it for yourself, and you will wander, seeking ownership of everything you see."

One Comes Upon A Meadow

My friend resolves that no other can return the love he might ask from them. He believes he is the only one capable of such a return. In the recognition of the nature of love, he says he'll have no other gods before him. We say God is love, but we prefer an awful image of God, in judgment as large as our imagination. My friend seeks a companion closer than his thoughts, who occupies him without occupation. I've come upon a similar sense, as one comes upon a meadow on a long day's hike in the woods.

Suddenly, I'm at peace, undefined by my surroundings. I begin to sense that this man I am being might get none of his coloring from his choice of lovers, friends, work, or place. An actor, known for his versatility and consistent adherence to the roles he plays, known for his integrity and believability, after a long and successful career at the heart of his characters, retires to having no more need to perform. The faces of his layers settle into one, and that one is absorbed into his whole self. He reunites himself. He sits back in

his soul, and the body of his work follows him to the center.

The Death of the Muse

The surface passion I cherish as if it were the source has fallen into the deeper passion it merely imitates. Light bulbs fall into the sun. That popping sound is the resolution of their difference. The separation of invention from its source dissolves in a flurry of concatenation. The death of the muse is the muse's liberation. She can come and go as she pleases, free of expectation. The end of passion's romance is bleak, when it first occurs. It's an empty feeling of desertion, the bleakest ride on a bleak road, until it's ridden free of expectant dreams.

Every day, I sit with no muse in my heart, no god in my sanctuary, in this home of what drives and informs me. Inspired, as I breathe, the muse no longer dances apart, assuming a self of obvious stature, but instead, it stays within, assuming nothing. I checked with my friend to see if I had misquoted him in my writing. "How can you misquote me?" he said, "I'm always in motion." I said I had invented a voice for his words. "Words," he said, "have only the meaning we give them, they're just noises."

Handwriting the Mist

On this foggy day, the calligraphy of the barren trees blurs. Nothing in my eyes can make it clear. I'm forced to accept its washed-out beauty, reconsider beauty, or open myself up to beauty itself. The only lover left on this island becomes my own self, in love itself. When being here is my ubiquity, I see I'm beloved in my own eyes. These words are true, but there are no words for the truth of love.

I think of resorting to she, to reinvent a lover, to reduce love to an other, to redraw the trees, to etch them to a certain beauty, to paint my island to a city, to a few houses on a street, to a house, to a single room. I look back at the trees and I see the fog suffuse the branches. I see fullness, where I had seen only indistinction. I see embrace where blurred lines are lost in the whole.

This Perfect Year

Emotions reduce to their wants, needs, and desires, like children who haven't been raised to their maturity. Thoughts want their emotions to do as

they're told. These imperious tyrants, whose tyranny I have bred, fed and grown to their adolescence, have filled my house with clamor and distress. My attachment to them is the source of their development. I'm responsible for their irresponsibility. The extent of my emotions' honesty has been to admit how much they'd love to be honest. My thoughts claim the definition of honesty. I say I don't want to repeatedly birth these babies. I want my house empty of their footsteps. Instead of parading a masquerade for my entertainment, I want to witness their maturity.

I once loved the commotion of my tender house, even when it was torn by strife. I loved the drama of love ripped and tossed about like furniture. I loved the posed and proffered passion of anger and fear. I loved the withheld and hurled hurt and healing cries in a house where nothing hurt gets healed. I wanted dramatic demonstrations of my significance, even if nothing significant was demonstrated to my satisfaction.

Then, one day, I didn't want it. I no longer want to pour my wine on the ground, when there's a cask in my heart that holds the vintage to its finest year. This perfect year has seen my thoughts and emotions come to peace in themselves, not by instruction or correction, but by their becoming who they are in their maturity, no longer posing as who I am.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Happiness is revolutionary. Happiness is transformative. Despite studies that say we're given a degree of happiness, that above a certain economic line, we maintain and return to a fixed degree of happiness, no matter what else might happen. The studies of happiness say our thinking is the measure of our happiness. These studies suggest the antidote to the kind of thinking that negates happiness is engagement in activities that matter, or in being with others.

It is suggested that when thinking is overridden by more productive thinking, happiness rises, as if, inside thinking, one simply moves to a better neighborhood. But one can step outside and beside thinking, as well as merely switching to a better class of thought. Revolution begins, transformation occurs, and happiness ensues, not as the result of anything thought, but as the nature of the uninterrupted moment in which thought becomes a submissive and useful companion.

I begin any activity that engages me, with my thoughts at the ready, beside me, within easy reach. Peace is the willing submission of any thought. I don't suppress thought but accept its presence beside me. Thought's purpose is to cultivate the flowering of happiness. The seed of happiness is not born in thought but in the energy of being itself.

Cryptic Brothers

Two men sit near each other, exchanging cryptic remarks. Their complicity allows a shorthand. The best part of it is that they don't lie to themselves or to each other. I picked up Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poetry, in a two-dollar thrift store book. His sharp, brotherly voice fills my ears. I hear my friend, the same way. I'm shocked to read the poet is only nine years older than I am. I saw him read, when I was young. He spoke in Russian, and I didn't understand a word he said. I thought it was the best reading I'd ever been to. I didn't care about meaning. A brother's voice sang in my ears.

My friend is my brother, and I am his. If I introduced him to my blood brothers, they wouldn't recognize him, as they don't recognize the way a few words on a faded page in a small old book lose their 'wordness' and leap to my center. Yevtushenko says he saw an old man he thought was Ernest Hemingway plow his way across a bar in Copenhagen. My brother has written a book about Hemingway. I once mocked Hemingway as the man who created characters smaller than life, but the poem about the old man's startling presence made me love him in that moment. Two old men sit together and tell the truth to each other. I could stop now and make a play of it, but there's a beautiful lost language in not writing down what goes unsaid.

The Belonging

In a room where the desire to belong is the subject, I don't belong. The methods I have sought in order to belong, were the same methods I sought to belong in myself. Someone said, "We all suffer from terminal uniqueness." I said, "Yes, and how poorly we've explored its secrets." I have sought a place in a world where belonging means too much and I found my social self in the presence of anyone I might face. Still, there's no group that defines my society. I'm a man of the people, although I don't address them, except each one as one.

I thought I wanted to belong to her, or her to me, or us to each other, or us to ourselves together, but none of those names apply. She looked away, and I left the room. The more I discover the root of belonging, the less I'm in need of it. My home is where there's no journey away from here. My home is where there's no need to return to what I've never left. My home is where there's no need to belong, where I've never been apart.

The War is Over

The President saved us from war by taking us to war. We lived in dark times, but the light was the same. My life seemed to be unfolding toward its goal, then it changed. I sought what didn't work. Mislead by a sense of the clarity of my purpose, I was led to the jumping off place. I was led to leap. I was certain that love for another was the focal point of my inherent reality. I was certain that, for my passionate work to continue, it was necessary to seek love for and from someone else. I practiced what I believed, and I trusted my practice.

Whenever I was in love, I wrote poems of love. When I wrote poems of love, I was in love. Finally, when there was no other, I asked myself, "Why can't love stay, when the object of love goes away?" I stayed in the recognition of love. With no other to signify love, while living in the absence of the other, I saw the unending reality I thought had been brought to the surface by the presence of a desired love.

Because I expressed love in the presence of an other, the other was always present whenever I expressed love. I couldn't see the love without the other. In the storm, we see the weather, but the weather is never not here. We say we love the calm, but we define it as the absence of the storm. We say we love peace, but we define it as the absence of war. We say we love 'love,' but we define it by the presence of the other. Love is never not here. There is no other to define the true nature of love. My passion subsided to ever and always. It left me with never being left alone in love. Now I experience the weather without the storm. I live in the center, without the periphery to define it, and the light is the same.

Fear Covers the Sun

Fear covers the sun. Wherever we see fear, there's sun behind it. She said it was fear that kept her from the love between us. I could see the sun, and she

could see the fear. The fear was clear to her. She was bold to say what was in her eyes, to call fear by its name, but she couldn't see the sun. We say, "The sun is not out. The sun is hiding behind the clouds. The sun isn't showing its face. There's no sun, today."

We know the sun is steady in its position. We know we're the unsteady ones. But fear covers the sun, and we can only say what we see. Angry clouds cover the sun. Anger is the storm of fear. When she says she sees fear, she flies closer to the sun, closer to the parting of the clouds. The color of fear is gray, and anger is even darker. Black clouds are a deep anger with depression, and behind them is the sun, the ever-present sun. It is the sun we fearlessly circle every day of our lives.

The Same Old Room

I sit in the corner of a room where people come and go. The place is nearly full. It's nearly empty. Nothing is ever completely empty or completely full. If it were, it would be full of everything that is, or it would be empty of everything that is, but here is such a room, and this is that room. This room is full when it's empty and empty when it's full. Everyone knows what it's like to sit in the corner of a room that's full and feel it empty, and to sit in the corner of a room that's empty and feel it full. All the stages between are the days of our lives, but the extremes are not like days.

I sit in the corner of a room that takes the shape of what fills it and empties it. I watch how it becomes more and less full, more and less empty. I look for fullness and emptiness that have nothing to do with these days. I knew a man who was suddenly flying in his running, in the middle of a game, one day, and that extended moment in his life changed him. He flew out of time, running across the ground, surrounded by others, running inside himself. He flew himself full, and he was emptied of who he was. He could have stopped for tea in his fortuitous flight. It changed him. He was never the same after that, and nothing changed. He was the same as he'd always been.

Behind the Sun

The hardest thing to do is to keep doing what once felt momentous, when it's lost its momentum. To not rule the world, to be considerate of the least, to show one's face where one is no longer a surprise, to return to what once felt like a beginning, to dance on the head of a pin when everyone already

knows your steps. In this spiral, I twist and turn, looking for newness. When I flow with surrender, everything becomes new, in the wonder of the ordinary.

I look at my friend's face and wonder why I don't describe those minute physical realities as a way to speak, the way I often use the weather. Then we were interrupted. A third man came to tell a story. His story became the telling of something, and that became the opportunity to say other things, for as long as he was allowed to speak. I could have said to him, "My friend and I aren't having a casual chat you can discount for your own pleasure. We're building something that we erase, that we build and erase, that we endlessly build and erase."

The third man is an occasionally brilliant architect of his modest dreams, but he assumes no foundation. He runs from idea to ideas, seeking a venue for his performance, looking for openings, entertaining possibilities, until the possible is no longer entertained. There's nothing new under the sun, but everything's new within its reach.

My Friend

He pushes his face with bony fingers and the lines multiply. He squints and the corners of his eyes wrinkle. Gestures start in far parts of his body and arrive in seconds at his hands, then appear on the terrain of his face. By the time he speaks, a physical preamble has been spoken and most of the point is already made. His language is a consortium of rights and speculations, an imprecise search for precision, a guerrilla landing behind enemy lines in friendly territory. He has a poem on his wall that's hard to look at, without wanting to read it. A painting would do better in its place. One can intellectually ignore a painting.

My friend is a painting in progress, a poem of scattered allusions, a box of performance pieces, a dance of moveable parts. He's come out of a year of dying. He put his body in the ground, and it's begun to sprout, with the seeds he scattered in his garden self with one hand over his eyes. He stands up when he lies down, and he lies at ease when he stands. Movement is his guru, but they've been together so long they are like one.

My teacher had a buddy, another ancient Indian, unlike the hundreds of Westerners who gathered around him, he seemed like a grizzled old pal. I

wondered if he wasn't the strength behind the absence of a throne, like a pitcher's favorite catcher, the guy who knows every pitch in the book and every batter they must face. My friend takes his wisdom behind the plate, as much as he might, if he were the one doing the pitching.

And Then We Can Go To War

I thought I had no emotional life, until I remembered it. Eventually almost everything gets called an emotion. During the war of my youth, I wanted to prove I had no emotions. I wanted to go where killing was a job for the unfeeling. I imagined a kind of nirvana, where my own fear was negligible, like a version of heroism, not in the brazen defiance of death but in the cocoon of its denial. Even then, I knew it was a misunderstanding of my nature.

Everything seemed easy in those years, between childhood and its successor, whatever that might become. Life was succinct and personal. No admirable adulthood was available as an example I might take to heart. It seemed there was no heart to which it might be taken. My heart was a piano I couldn't play. My emotions were distant music in a floating hotel on a stormy sea. I would have made a lousy killer. I watched a man grab a cat, hit by a car, flailing in its dying, and snap its neck like a twig. I wanted to be able to kill like that.

Then I found heart, I found emotions, and one day I found peace, beneath my fear and terror, and my interest in cold death died. Let us commit to raise our young and ourselves to the surrender of defiance in the bravado of denial. Let us commit to the moment of survival in our tender selves, and then we can go to war with war itself.

The Life of the Poet

This thing I do becomes difficult when I think of it as a thing I do. It is the simple recording of itself by itself. I merely set the table for the banquet. My habitual setting of the table has made it a thing I do. Two young beauties set themselves up in sight, as young beauties sometimes do, whenever they determine there's a place to be seen. They lounge in their chairs like pashas on their cushions, stroking their hair like issues of state. They are the state. They discuss the maintenance of the state, past, present, and future. A young man joins them, with a sexuality that's no threat to theirs. He's a brother

they caress like a surrogate lover.

Men of state sit erect on their cushions and discuss the issues of state that have made them the state. During a break, I walk among painters, in a modeling session at a university in the city. I see them practicing their art. I wondered, “Why do you practice your art, when you sit in the place of your artistry? Make art. Every time you begin, your art begins.”

I’m pulled together by this vortex, this black hole of brilliant light. It makes stillness a rigorous life. I put myself in the place of what is, so that what is, can be itself. There is no metaphor for this. As soon as there is, it becomes a thing to be practiced, or it becomes an empty pose with expectations. Then it becomes a thing I do. The difficulty comes in that illusory construction of work to be done, with work that’s only done in its undoing.

Between Small Dark Towns in Illinois

My uncle came back from the slaughter of war, a changed man, never fully present in his life, again, until he was dead in a crash. He drove his car off a bridge, flew a few hundred feet in the air, and landed in the night against a riverbank between small dark towns in Illinois.

He was in the ice cream business, engaged to a woman who loved him, but life had ended around him so many times in such hurtful ways, he couldn’t be free of it. It’s not hard to believe his death was not accidental, that he drove his car into a room where he was finally happy to be alive.

In a familiar room, tired of its familiarity, I think to think away from it. Instead, I think to that part of the room that has no familiarity, more familiar than anything I know on its face. The greater part of this unknown reality fills the room with my disappearance that takes the place of everything that takes place within it.

To Drop the Name of God

I choose to drop the name of God from my poems, to let occur what I don’t invoke. I no longer invite “she” to these words, either. I want to see how she might appear, when I don’t call her name. I speak of what I don’t describe, to see it present by the nature of its being. I write an old friend about the possibilities for me in his town, and I immediately regret it. I’m content,

being open to what lies in front of me. I'd rather not fish for what I can't reach with my hands. When I imitate the ambitions of those around me, there's no hope in my approximation.

I have no home and no hope in the ways of others. I found this shore, where the river never stops, but when I think about the land downstream or up river, I nearly drown in my calculations. I heard a wise man say, "Poets are the luckiest people. They have the opportunity, at the moment of creation, to turn and look and see the source. But they don't," he said, "because they fall in love with the thing created." I survive that temptation, daily. This transient freedom becomes apparent in the open entrance to the oracle's cave, neither in nor out of its reality, in being neither the oracle nor the world beyond the oracular.

The Hole in the Fence

The freestanding roof to the gasoline pumps across the road appears in a band of yellow against the white hills of winter. A woman does a dance for her small boy. When one's eye catches the eye of another who looks abruptly away, the connection is accented. A communion is acutely joined. We're alike in our separate differences, and we're careful to protect the shared charade, like kids peeking through a hole in the fence, until another eye looks back, and we jump and run. In an accidental recognition, one eye meets another, not to begin an acquaintance or in the familiar exchange of social greetings, but without agenda, without current or corral. One sees the seeing of the other in a neutral joy of being.

The same eye looks back at the same eye looking. We are colleagues of creation, born to carry creation inside and outside who we are. We are relegated to a corner of ourselves until a simple glance is caught by its reality. Then we jump to the unnumbered whole in the common eye of the impertinent universe. We're thrilled and terrified by this impersonal moment that personalizes our joy, in the eyes of someone else.

Life on the Inside

When I came out of the house, it was still cold. This unusual winter is still here. In the movies, winter lasts a short time. In a poem, it lasts a few words. But here, it's cold, day after day, week after week, month after month, cold to the point of being constant, until springtime comes. Nelson Mandela was

in jail for twenty-seven years, and when he emerged, he was cheerful. He wasn't in jail, anymore. The day he was released was the same day, twenty-seven years later, as it would have been, no matter what had happened to him.

As soon as we're no longer cold, the cold is gone. Everything lasts until it ends. The disappointing shock of capital punishment is that when the murderer is gone, his punishment ends. The killer no longer remains. His punishment is brief. A far greater punishment would be imprisonment with no hope of release, but even the most brutal murderers eventually die. Living continues to torment those for whom life is torment. Sociopaths go off to prison with a smirk. Nothing seems to bother a stunted and stony heart.

I wanted to imagine I could not live without a certain desired love. Protestations of permanence hang in tatters on the walls of their declaration. A certain public figure says he's in constant pain, but he forgets it when he speaks. His interest outweighs his pain. His pain falls subordinate to his passion. I'm not cold, in this long, arid, and barren winter, but I remember my imprisonment fondly.

He Dared to Eat a Peach

More than wants, she needs to be alone. Her transformation demands it. She imagines a self more good, in whose place she now sees herself less good. She seeks transcendence, when transformation would take her to the greater good. When snow falls on ice, it's a treacherous beauty. There are no broad shoulders in one's vulnerability. A book, that reviews T.S. Eliot's character, honors his description of repression and the inability to act. He was the star of his generation. He dared to eat a peach.

The risk of our terrifying nakedness is the discovery of nuanced joy, not the big joy, as advertised. Joy is as dismissible as an unwanted product. Joy is eliminated from our desires by the experience of our habits. What's imagined of joy remains unknown in the narrow reality of never knowing it. The kind of alone she needs to be isn't the same as the one that walks away from others. The practiced mind knows it will die in this transforming aloneness. Poorly painted death hangs alongside homely joy, in the private gallery of those who've never been alone. They're hung there, as a warning against beauty being real.

Hoping for sunrise, we board up our windows and doors and begin cleaning the house. This is the aloneness of those who think aloneness is being without others. It's a warning against truth being true, against freedom being free. We've taught ourselves to price the real out of our reality. Her transformation needs her to go alone into who she is, until there's no one present but the presence that makes her possible. She needs to go without name or promise into the aloneness that doesn't include her. Eskimos have a hundred words for snow. Nuanced joy awaits her further journey.

My New Hat

I've yet to learn the etiquette of this small town on the high desert, where nature never lets one forget its presence. I took my hat off among others who kept their hats on, but when I made a joke of it, my casual indiscretion was forgiven. I hurry too fast to the wedding of my habits to the habits of others, hoping for a honeymoon of the heart. A beautiful, brilliant girl in India is matched with hundreds of suitors. She turns them all down. There's no reason not to wait. The bank with all the money doesn't need to advertise.

The gold at the surface trickles down the rock face, in a century's slow revelation of its hidden lode, while bandits raid the sluices to strip the gleanings from hapless prospectors. The tea I drink every day comes in bags filled by machine from a vat of various ingredients. The process can't guarantee that each bag will provide a proper blend.

My mind closes the book on its self-chosen work. It ends the ordering of thoughts in their accumulation. The journey seems at an end, when the mind sees landfall in its scope. Someone says they like my hat. I say, "I don't usually like hats, but I like this one." I've begun to wear it every day. The only marriage I'm suited for is the one I forget to attend. It's the one that never starts and never ends. In a ceremony of unlikely ingredients, I drink the tea of my nature.

Indifferent to the Difference

An older man describes the time he experienced as a young man, at the end of the day, exhausted as he began to sleep, saying, apropos of nothing, "Take me and do what you will, my life is yours." He says he saw a figure coming toward him in the darkness, but he turned away and said, "No, I'm not ready."

As the years pass, he thinks his unreadiness to meet himself coming is a failure of his, but he's already opened the door to his surrender, and it stays open for as long as it takes. He's ruined himself for good. He's at a loss to understand why people live in their boxes of behavior. They seem content to exchange one box for another, until they reach the box of their demise. His glimpse of surrender ruins the life of boxes for him. He waits for the final surrender. He's ready for the good to come. He's ready, in the readiness of that night, long ago, when he thought he'd failed.

His life, since that night, has been a series of surrenders, a series of preparations, a series in the smaller good of its greater good. His readiness keeps him ready in the way it demonstrates itself, over and over, in ways large and small. The figure coming toward him is not some other to whom he feels an obligation and can't acquiesce. It is his own being, approaching him in his own dream of awakening. His fulfillment is the surrender of himself to himself. The removal, of everything that might prevent his surrender, becomes his life's occupation, until nothing stands in the way but the fulfillment of his surrender, foreshadowed and foretold by who he is, in the distant past of who he was, indifferent to the difference.

Trees in a Row

I See the Sun

The sun is out. The clouds are out of the way of the sun. The earth shifts slowly on its axis. Two men sit in the sunlight. The sun bakes their shirts, the hair on their heads, their skin. Their coffee stays hotter a little longer. The trees soak up the sun to their later benefit. Spring is barely weeks away. I've been baked to a quiet. I confess the terrible secret of my life. I long for the day when I'm reduced to sitting in the sun looking at nothing, that is, at its essence, without distraction. A man, who's just off the road, swings his arms and slaps his sides. He's either encouraging his horse to the trough, or he's simply showing his gratitude for the ride.

What if I never had another thought? What if I had nothing more to say? What if I sat in the sun, feeling my awareness? Someone must have shown me something, a long time ago, and I was struck silent, to be so amazed that there was nothing to be said and nothing to be done. Children ingest the world and feed it back, but before they're directed in their observation, they simply see what's in front of them. Put one thing before them, and they see that. Put a million things before them, and that's what they see. I'm inclined to shove almost everything aside, after sorting through the avalanche and the flood, on my way back to the few.

I wonder what it was I loved, in the beginning. It may not have been anything in particular. It may have been the awareness of my existence, and maybe the sun. Each of us is born with the awareness of our existence. The fledgling mind invents beliefs from that reality that do not serve our nascent love of existence. One belief is that we are God, and another is that there is a God in our image.

The Other in the Self

In a movie made when I was four, I see a small boy pulling a shovel, longer than he is, on the ground through some lumber. I've seen this brief movie, many times, and I have no visceral sense that the boy in the movie is who I am. It's a brief movie of a boy I once was, in another life I don't recall. He reveals himself to me in this short piece of film. I see him pull the shovel, until some plank catches the blade. With no hesitation, he turns the blade

and clears the obstruction, until he pulls the shovel along again.

The rest of the movie shows him throwing pieces of bread in a pond to feed some ducks. He stands alongside his sitting mother, who hands him the pieces for him to throw. I love that little boy with a love he didn't know at the time, no offense to his parents, they were incapable of loving him the way I can. We are kin, that boy and I, more than we are the same. I want to honor him, and when he realizes the shovel is stuck and corrects its path, I don't care to praise him. I see him alive, in characterless awareness of his own. I praise him for his life. Never mind the ducks he minds in minding his mother.

A Death by Drowning

I haven't been to the Deep South, although I rode along with my parents on a trip to Florida when I was a young teenager. We stayed in Pompano Beach, after staying at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami, where Frank Sinatra had performed. We didn't see him. We visited the giant cannon in St. Augustine that had been used in a movie about Spain. The past is malleable. Memory is a sculptor, a moviemaker, and a genius at rewriting itself. The subplot never changes. My ex-wife's sister drowned in the same ocean off the same shore as the one I swam in. In my mind's malleable memory, I put my feet in the same water, at the same time.

Two Black girls talk and walk a few dance steps as an accompaniment to their social chatter. This is an opportunity for memory to reinvent realities. I put these two in a club in San Francisco, where nothing much happens, but they stand in for some image I seem to want to help out, like an enrichment of an otherwise forgotten moment.

My friend wants to talk to a woman he knew thirty years ago. There's something he wants to say to her, but he's not sure what it is. He hasn't seen her in the intervening time, but time has no power. I encourage him. I say she's waiting to hear him speak. He says he could be an imaginary doctor, leaving a long-overdue message. I tell him to be himself and let her be whoever he might not be.

What's the use of these flexible movies of something remembered? I've seen enough movies of the Deep South to convince me I've been there. It doesn't change the subplot that never changes. It's like building and rebuilding

houses on the side of Mt. Vesuvius. Sinatra was in the movie about the cannon. Maybe he had something to do with my ex-wife's older sister. Her death changed everything in her family, except the people.

Defined by Destination

I've been responsible for nurturing a life to a purpose beyond pleasure and satisfaction, but I feel a new sense of both pleasure and satisfaction. I see how I've taken pleasure in the legwork of my journey, with every setback seen as an integral part of the progression, until it suddenly doesn't feel like that. Any detour on the journey, when the journey isn't defined by its destination, is only part of the journey and not an obstruction to the destination.

But, when destination defines the journey, any obstruction or detour can become intolerable. I may have discovered the camouflaged presence of destination in this journey, because my progression is suddenly less accepting of its obstacles. Destination has reared its head. When obstacles seem less acceptable as a part of the journey, they seem more like obstacles to be overcome, and this thought has me thinking more about destination. In other words, without being aware I had a destination in mind, the dissatisfaction with obstacles shows me I may have had one all along. It may also indicate I've come to a point where I've chosen a destination, where there hadn't been one before.

What is destination but something that directs our steps, by our own desire, or by the desire of others, or by an unseen desire in the world of relative realities, or by the unseen desire of an indefinable reality beyond our knowing. Regardless its origin, we come to be conscious of its presence in our lives. It may be all the above. Surrendering to what moves me doesn't mean I need to be ignorant of its ingredients. Being conscious of its ingredients doesn't need to impede the journey or the destination. Hamlet became conscious of the working parts of his destiny but it didn't stop him from avenging the death of his father.

Dangerous Joy

Frightening pictures get more attention than pleasant pictures. Fear is the greater force. We continue to feed on the fear that seems grounded in primal instincts. We want to learn what might do us harm. What seems safe and

good calls for less attention. It's in our interest to want to know what might bring us pain and sorrow. But few care about the nuances of joy. There's no apparent threat in joy. In our instinctive behavior, we disregard it, but there is nuance in joy, and the threat of joy is as great as the threat of anything we might fear. Joy rips us out of our calculated lives. It breaks us free from the protected safety in the steady rain of our fears.

In our lives, there's control of joy and the prohibition of joy. Joy destroys boundaries and disrupts the habits of fear. Joy creates a state of vulnerability, even greater than the disregard for danger. How will I function in a threatening reality, if I'm taken by joy? I think, surely, no good can come of me, living unprotected in joy. If I study joy, the way I study fear, in order to learn its lessons, I may be able to live in joy, without fear. I might learn to live, using of the tools of joy. But if I run from joy, I'll never know its nuances. I may never die of joy.

Mutual Serenade

A beautiful girl creates herself as a commodity of beauty. It becomes her cover and her protection. She becomes her own profession, but it's still not a projection of her essence. A preacher says his healing acts have nothing to do with him, that he's only the channel for healing, but people still praise his gift. Each of us is the example of who we are. We hold ourselves out in front of our essential being.

I witness essential being in the dance of a dancer. Wonder dances out of me, in the presence of someone else, in the dance of my wonder. I take a lesson of essence from anyone's personal presence. The blind can lead the blind, if the path is familiar and the visual is unnecessary to their destination. Just as a vision can lead the sighted to see more of the seer who appears in themselves. I open my eyes to see what's shown. Who shows essence, if we say it only exists in the absence of our attention? How do we show what nobody sees in direct light? Whose dance is an example of what we ignore? Those with a sense of themselves as spiritual go to meditation and prayer to look away from their spirituality. The hand that points to essence is nothing to be loved for its direction, but the fear of essence makes it so. We love those who seem to look for us, so we don't have to look for ourselves.

Occupations of Dark Constraint

The snow-topped hills have receded to the second row of horizon. Winter is in retreat from spring. Balmy yesterday is blustery today. Tomorrow is the last day of the quarter. I have papers to grade. Icarus was forced back to earth. Apollo throws down his reins. I put my fading houseplants on the deck to soak the sunlight. I was surprised when, after a few hours, they weren't bleeding green. Constraints are what occupy us. We wear definition like anything that's not the sun of our metamorphosis. Our leaves fall off, and we go shopping for new leaves, instead of dragging ourselves into the sun.

I have a closet full of definition. I have caves for my character and several occupations of dark constraint. A woman, so thin she drapes her body in shadow, wears red on her toes, a pink bandana around her head. I see her beauty and my seeing begs for photosynthesis. Whatever my eyes have been taught, they are their teacher. I want to fly into the blinding sun, until I'm fat on forgetfulness.

The Old Building Burned to the Ground

My friend's shop and gallery burned to the ground. Life is what you expect it to be, and then one day nothing is the same and never will be again. He held images of the current war alongside the loss of his business. Everyday life is wartime in slowtime. The old dairy building, home to artisans, was a local landmark, a genial gathering place of disparate souls, engaged in their chosen work. I took pictures as it burned and when it was a bin of charred ruins. The capable firemen never set foot in the building. Instead, they poured water in from trucks, in fat hoses, breaking the windows, until the roof collapsed. Its wooden beams burned for hours.

In war and everyday life, we see terrible death, relentlessly ignorant of our worth and our compassion. We wonder about those who survive such cruel absurdities with their sanity intact. How do they continue to be sane, despite our presumed supremacy over the rampantly meaningless? They do it by the gift of their breathing.

My ex-lover's daughter died too soon. It became an endless war of dying. Everyday, the same young woman was killed before it could be accepted. She was killed, again and again, by cruel death in the mind of her mother, who watched death in her child, who saw death take and retake her life, who

danced on the precipice of sanity. Transient death comes and goes, like bullets in the air. We are given to smell the unbroken air between the bullets, and breathe it in.

Parceled Possibilities

“If I never see you again, it’ll be like old times,” my friend said. He got ready to leave town, after his building burned down, just for a week or so, but it felt like goodbye. Everything does, these days. It’s like being pushed out of town. A place of spirit and solace has been denied. It was a place where he and I sat and talked. I wanted to be with my last desired love, so I could do amazing things in the sun of her approval, and then the wind came up. The wind is a character in the life of this town. I’m compelled to find another home. I’m most at home where I’m least at home and set free to play in myself among the selves of everyone else.

In San Francisco, a city of misfits and brilliance, I felt accepted everywhere I went. In Honolulu, a city of sun, water and air, my body felt welcome. In India, I was at home like a native of its native spirit, but here in this cowboy town, I feel the absence of some sort of welcome. I grew up in this kind of town. I learned the way of it. I enjoy my ability to belong where I don’t. I’ve tasted parts of belonging, but never the fullness. I may have to accept it in parceled possibilities. My friend is moving away. I’ll be without his solace and stimulation. I’ve lived with this absent love before in the solace and stimulation of their origins.

The Moment of Chancy Death

The random speed of war feeds the recognition of arbitrary death without cessation. It is the sudden, prolonged occasion of reality, insistent and unrelenting, that comes without explanation or alternative. One man in the factory, after the Big War, said he was taught to kill but not how to stop. He said they swept him up and threw him in the war and then they threw him back out again. He said he loved his family but he couldn’t feel that love. He couldn’t stop fighting and years later he was still fighting.

Peace is time and space between separate wars. We fill the space to avoid the inescapable reality. We’re expected to live in peace in the illusion of life, to walk away from the truth of war itself, not to look back on what we might have seen, or what we might have been in the seeing. Between wars, in no

war raging, there's no illusion but the constant reality. We have the luxury to embrace it. This time out is no end of cruel awareness but a place for the embrace of our absence that is greater than our gloried occupation of destruction. This is the open moment of that enclosing truth. Some never feel more alive than when death is their partner. It's not that death is such a good dancer. It's not death that teaches the amazing purity of one's existence, but the absence of life's illusion. The moment of chancy death is the same as this prolonged presence of reality.

Celestial Orb

A man goes to his car and brings back his tool kit to tighten the legs of a sidewalk table in front of the café. In his swept-wing sunglasses, alongside another man in aviator sunglasses, the sky behind them is a metallic gray with sunlight burnishing its surface to a glaring brightness, and its color is washed away. As one who has been a romantic poet, a passionate devotee, a lover artist, I find myself extolling the virtues of reality, knowing that beneath reality lies the link to everything I cherish.

I don't mean to describe the presence of a divine supremacy but an ocean of acceptance. In some distance from my last layered romance, I have come to see my mind invest any reality with romance with such insistence that it startles me. I see that any desired love creates its lover. With persistent awakening, reality is stripped of romance, and its true beauty is revealed. Human beings fall in love for greater reason and with greater passion, when the look in their eyes shows no compromise.

Two people change what they are in the company of the other. Then when that company is disbanded, they change back to themselves and live in disappointment. Two who become more of who they are in their mutual company rise above themselves. The best examples are hard to name. They seem individual in their enhancement like mountain cedars with intertwined roots. To call such lovers romantic is like giving a pet name to the sun, like "sunny," or "fireball," or "rosy-fingered dawn."

I want my romance stripped clean, so I can dance naked with love itself and feel its skin against mine. I want to dance naked and leave nothing behind I'd miss, when there's nothing left behind but my death. This is the reality I find most unromantic, more beautiful than romantic, to live in love when there's no other version of it.

The Guises of Desire

The template has changed. My imagination about women has no more hold. Desire has lost its disguises. I see it in everyday thinking. I don't see through its filter. I removed the filter. I hold it beside me, like a pair of old glasses. It doesn't hold me in its power. It seemed to be such a simple thing. It was so quiet in its power and so effective in coloring the world to my liking. My life has been like Odysseus returning to a Penelope he's never met, after looking in everyone's face to see if she is she, after looking in men's faces as if to say, "I'm the one looking for who she is." Imagine Odysseus returned to an empty house, with no wife and no suitors trying to gain her eye.

I thought the awareness of my habitual loving was sufficient to free me from it, but it was like a drunk who knows he's a drunk and easily says so. Nothing is changed by knowledge until knowledge is changed by change. The only sure first step, in letting go of the addiction to drink, is to stop drinking. The truth tells the truth of when and how it's told. A drunk who says he's a drunk is still a drunk.

In my Odyssean honesty, I told her, when I began my journey, that I loved the journey more than I loved her. It was a kind of brave dishonesty. I never believed it, until she was gone, and I realized for the first time I had told the truth in the first place. I had made my eyes to lie. I looked for her in every set of eyes, in all the years I was away. The love of another became guises of desire. I searched to find what gave me comfort and protected me from seeing how alone I was on my journey. Now I stand alone in my empty home. I see now that she was there in my imagination to serve my need to leave her and seek her at the same time, to hold her and let her go in one impossible gesture.

I no longer looked for her except in wishing I did. I want back my cloak of comfort, here in this empty house. It didn't matter how many years I was away. I felt her presence. She was my wife in a wifeless world, until she set me free by refusing to exist. My journey took me to this aloneness. Despite being my proclaimed direction, I pretended I didn't believe it as my destination. I needed to desire her, until I could stop believing in desire. I needed to believe, until I was strong enough to drop the costume of belief. I came home to drop the mask of brokenhearted lover. I came home to discover the home beneath the house I built in its honor.

A Flower Grows in Brooklyn

People are thawing out, moving about, showing signs of life. My neighbor ripped out two bushes so she could plant some flowers. I see, in a satellite map of Ocean Park Boulevard in Brooklyn, New York, how densely packed that famous city is. All stories reduce to one or two. In a world gorging on people, it still comes down to a few. I was invited to visit a family in a house in a district in a city in India, a country of nine hundred million people. The husband yelled at his old father, and the wife yelled at her husband, and a young son cowered in a corner.

I was never bothered by the crowd on the teeming streets of India, as long as I could see their faces, one at a time, or a few at a time. When I first moved to San Francisco, I imagined the city from above. It seemed as if every building housed adventures in the lives of all the people inside them. I was breathless in the anticipation of my imagination, lifting the roofs off the houses to see the people inside. In time, the mystery was replaced by a long list of experiences. The trip to India came later. I was refreshed, by then, but I still granted the gift to the mystery, replacing the disillusionment of experience, reinstating my expectations of wonder where they'd been drained away.

The flood of wanting to know everything there is to know drowns out the innocence, but innocence returns, remembering nothing of the storm. One's experience doesn't disappear in the regaining of innocence. One turns to innocence itself and not to the material swept up in the flood of one's experience. Every story boils down to a few, or two, or one. Here is where innocence requires faith. One brings innocence to the meeting of oneself and someone else, when dependence on experience can finally be put aside. Somewhere in Brooklyn, someone is ripping out flowers to plant bushes.

A Small Bird Perched in a Bare Tree

A small bird, perched in a bare tree, basks in the bright sun as if attending to an errand. He doesn't do anything, as far as I can tell, not being learned in the habits of small birds in bare trees. I begin to feel impatient, when a slight wind vibrates the tree. I wonder if the bird might be doing the tree a favor. I don't know what relationship they have. Tiny claws could be nurturing the growth of the twiggy branch. And then the bird is gone. A man walks close to the tree and the bird takes wing as small birds do, as if flung into the air,

swiftly aloft.

My attention is with the wind and the bird on the wing, as it is with the tree and its budding branch. Now the tree seems companion to the wind and not the bird. Now that the bird has flown, the tree reveals the presence of the invisible, where one moment before, the presence of the bird had kept my attention on the bird and its place in the tree. Absence of the other frees my attention to the unseen, to witness the nature of reality in the wind house of my unseen self.

Endurance

The warm weather gives off the idyllic sense that life is right again. After the ordeal of the cold, warmth is a sign of health in the air. A tiny, white-haired granny comes in, with the carriage of a much taller woman. Straight out of central casting, she plays larger on the screen. I'm going to see a movie about the serial killer who was running around the city when I was living there. I remember walking out of my apartment, late one night, headed for the corner for more wine, when I realized I was the typical victim of that killer. It didn't stop my progress, but it gave me pause.

None of us thinks we are the type, because none of us lives as a type. We live in a self-enclosed capsule that includes no one else, no matter how typical we might be. As many as there may be in our lives, we cannot escape the unique reality that is our consciousness. It's the same for everyone. None of us is a type in ourselves or in our deeper reality. We only reluctantly admit we have certain similarities in common with others. In fact, we're identical in our being and we're cookie-cutter copies in our form. The quirkiness of having thoughts gives us each a unique perspective. We think we're the only person alive, and everyone else is playing a part. This same consciousness leads to the opposite conclusion; that we are false and nothing we do is genuine. We must be a charade. We can't possibly be true.

The mind is the master of illusion and also its ultimate betrayer. The only freedom from this trap is to drop the relative reality of the mind and the illusion. They depend on each other for their security. A drunk thinks everyone else is drunk. It comes as a shock, when he's finally sober, to think everyone else is sober, too. We're all stumbling around in the dark, thinking we're the only one who sees the whole picture. At the same time, we think we have no clue, whatsoever.

As soon as the sun comes out, a certain conviviality comes out with it, along with the notion that the world is suddenly full of geniuses, fools, and objects of fear and sexual desire. The sun feels good on my legs. I can only guess how it feels in this mention of it.

Unwound Hero

I stood in the rain on the pitch, having committed a cardinal sin in sports. I turned my back on the play. I left the best player on the other team suddenly free to take a pass from the man I was then poorly guarding. I gave up a goal. It shamed my secret desire to play the hero. Heroics are the engine that drives my play. Whenever I hear “Great pass!” I’m good for another round of anticipated heroism. I wasn’t in good shape, but I played a game, another game the next day, and then I attempted to play a third game that night. My arrogance accepted the challenge, as if the decision itself was heroic. It was merely foolish. My legs turned to stone. No good comes of staying on the field past one’s ability to fight. The same goes for governments engaged in wars of willful arrogance.

I sit now in a café in the city, surrounded by the young and a few ragtag old-timers. I was young in this same sort of atmosphere. In a kind of polite curiosity, the young tolerate those whose presence is suspect. “Why are you here, old man? Do you think someone will take you for a hero?” Old rock stars go out for coffee, thinking someone may recognize them and smile. To an athlete who does not die young, your sense of heroism is unresolved by the passage of time. What will you do without your field of valor? The impulse of your heroism hasn’t gone away. It was there before you made your mark, and there are no more marks to be made. Or there are unseen marks and you don’t know what they are because they’re different from what they used to be.

Heroism must now let itself be shown in some other way, transformed from public display, spread from concentrated event, to diffuse reality. So you stay in shape and make the right passes at the right time. Heroes remain to be born, on the pitch of the unknown and the unknowable. As you once were, on another field of valor, you still are, in this valorous moment.

The Sermon After the Mount

“By the time you read this, I’ll be dead.” As a statement of literary and literal truth, these words you are now reading roll out of a reality that becomes part of the past as soon as they’re said. These words are instant artifacts. Language always postdates the reality they describe. Nothing that is said exists in the moment but only refers to it. Each word is a snapshot of the wind, now blowing in the neighbor’s woods. I once apologized, for the poems I was reading, as the expression of a man I no longer was. Time had passed, and I had changed. It was a stab at the truth, like everything we do. I was trying to diffuse a difficulty, when, in fact, every single word is the picture of a reality that no longer exists.

When his grandfather died, my son said, “It’s easier to love him now. His personality doesn’t get in the way.” The fact of the life of a living poet gets in the way of the poem. As little as we know of the poet, it helps introduce, define, and interfere with the transmission. A poet, sitting in a room with others, speaking from nothing, until the poetry becomes present, is the only way for poet and poetry to be present together, in the moment of originality, and still time takes its due.

These artifacts reach their fulfillment, eventually, and that allows their timelessness to shine through. The long-dead author of a poem speaks no longer for himself, if he ever did. As listeners, we’re no longer bound by our habits of courteous recognition. Jesus gets to be every Christian’s savior, once he’s dead and risen as something other than himself. The poet may eventually become the poet of the reader and not of himself.

Imagine those at the Sermon on the Mount who were compelled there by their more curious and devout companions. They don’t like the sound of the rabbi’s voice, or the cut of his jib, or the way he looks at his mother, or the business with the fishes. “What’s the price of fish got to do with anything, anyway?” they ask. They go home without the sense of the moment. Years later, they pass the story on to their children, and it comes alive in their own version of that day, long ago, when words were heard in time.

His Way

My brother has honestly told the truth of his life. It becomes a pleasure to read revelations that aren’t tied to an agenda, with no apocalyptic demand on

the reader to join the cause, with no demand for one to believe what he believes, or change one's behavior to match his. He's not looking for sympathy or support. He doesn't expect anyone to jump on the bandwagon he's dismantled to reveal its assembly. He's determined to pull back the curtain on every transient reality he's encountered, including his own. Especially his own. This is honesty in service to no god and no man.

I attempt the same. These passages are meant to reveal the workings of one man's existence, not to extol them or promote a vision, but because it's so rarely done, to see and say what's become clear in the accident of my existence. We are not so different, my brother and I. We're more identical than unique. I don't mean to say, "Look what I have seen!" I mean to say, "This is what I see." My brother does something the same. My brother's inclination is to expose those who despise exposure. And he's on to himself, as well. He knows the folly of his ambitions and the shortness of his life. I want to stand still and straight, at peace and ease. I look for the root of my dignity as I spin in the air. I'm brought to my knees by the chanciness of existence. "I see what is," Jesus might have said, "I am the way, the truth, and the light. Now you say it of yourself."

The Purple Stormy Skies

I'm feeling depressed in the absence of someone to love in my life. The love of all is insufficient to feed my heart to its fullness. That's my belief, and I don't like being the child of my beliefs. I see this depression come on me like the rain, or the gray, or the sadness of the season. This apprehension of loneliness is a diversion from the way my heart becomes more itself in the absence of any desired love. "I am alone," is my mantra of simple truth. It's the language of letting go of habitual thought. I am alone. When I say so, my palate is cleansed of intoxicating liquors.

The purple stormy skies darken to night. The lights in distant farmhouses mark the horizon, across the bleak, bare fields. I wax poetic, as poets are wont to do, turning the language into a landscape of erotic encounters. The bleak, bare fields and the purple stormy skies, a farmhouse lit from within, like the warm body of a lover. One can look for a lover the same way we look for a place to live, or in our words, a place to love.

The weather is what passes through, no matter how long it remains. To weather what passes is to become weathered, not worn and beaten. A

depression is a low point, a place to rest, like a hollow from which to rise or fall. I imagine two old people in reasonably good health loving each other to death. I imagine such love in the heart of the young. The inside out of depression is to know how to live beyond oneself, within the boundaries of one's body. I'm alone, in this aloneness, but that doesn't mean it's not inhabited by the aloneness of others, and there, love finds a language.

Orchard Boys

Even this steady quiet has its precedent. One's mind reproduces itself in the world, regardless of the world. I judge this, listening to my brother, whose mind operates somewhat in parallel. Living through the same events, we describe them in ways, so strikingly different, it seems unaccounted for. As alike as brothers would seem, I see the similarity of our eyes and tongues. He sees with identical eyes and speaks with identical tongue, yet what comes of it couldn't be more unlike. The variables of character define our different views of the cosmos as nearly incomparable.

Two boys are raised in a peanut-butter factory. One sees peanuts everywhere, and the other sees butter. Both are expert at making sandwiches with jelly. My brother asks my forgiveness for some imagined slight. I say that, between us, forgiveness is a given. I admire my brother for his recognition of nuts, in his understanding of the world, and I grow tired of my taste for butter. Even as I grow tired of his taste for nuts, I don't tire of his instinct to make a good spread. We left the factory behind, but not its assembly line. What he makes in his life looks like what I make in mine.

My brother and I grew apart because we were not the same. We remain brothers, because we are the same. His peculiarities, compared to mine, are apples and oranges, but we are orchard boys. Each of us a mixed metaphor, meant to describe the same reality. Driven by his example, I slingshot off my brother's courage. He shows me how to be who I am by being who he is. An ape learns from a gorilla how to navigate the jungle of their differences, watching how to leap and where to land. Six girls, just past puberty, stand in a group. Their casual unity of purpose protects them and propels them beyond themselves.

The License of Life

People walk to their cars on the mesa of America, this flat, open vista on the world. Living on the prairie, people think nothing of driving sixty miles, when they seem to see that far. When the sky is high, people walk to their waiting cars and drive away. I am less alone in the open heart than I am in the company of those who feel the burden of being alone. The rancher on his spread, alone by habit, belongs to his conglomerated self. His bonds are heightened by his aloneness. His family rides the fence line with him. He returns to what he never leaves.

When I first heard it said that a certain guru was never born, never died, it angered me. Of course he was born, of course he died, but his footprint was illusion, except to the reality in which he walked. There's wisdom in these windswept steppes. There's an abiding impermanence that drives many of us into huddled masses of polite strangers. Space breaks our vision open to the horizon, where no end is in sight, despite living in houses built on shifting sand under high skies of clouds like permanent homes of the imagination. Residence is identity. Nothing comes with us but what we bring to this residential moment. I come alone to the future. I walk to my car and drive away.

Desert Rock

A friend said he needed a caretaker for his mobile home in the Nevada desert. I thought it was a golden opportunity to live alone, five miles from civilization in a trailer with a case of bourbon and the chance to frequent the local whorehouse on occasional visits to town. I dreamed of sitting on a rock in the middle of the desert screaming at God. I had already begun to live in my own private exile.

My friend's offer was rescinded, when he thought about it. He knew I didn't need to go there. I thought it could have been a kind of salvation, entering purgatory as a kind of purgation. What makes us think punishment might be a reward? We imagine the source of pain demands compensation for its amends, as if pain is comforted by more pain? I've never been to a whorehouse. I imagined it as a kind of heaven. The drunk lies down in the gutter as if it's a four-poster bed.

I thought of that trailer fondly. Thoughts filled my imagination with scenes of pleasure; a cozy prison in the relentless wind and sand, a local girl, like a photograph come to life, a book written like a cry in the howling night, with my triumphant survival as its epilog. Everything good about that time remains good today, like an image of what lies beneath every idea. I imagined going to that exile in the desert by going away from everything it would have actually been. I went to my freedom by going where I knew better.

Welcome

Visiting my younger brother's home in the islands, year after year, what kept me from the pure enjoyment of its casual paradise was a lingering sense of myself as unwelcome. Not by my brother and his family, they were gracious. Not by the people, who were pleasantly indifferent. Certainly not by the weather. Instead, I carried my unwelcome within me. It was my character, or so I thought, until the feeling was gone. Now I see how I chose to be unwelcome, whenever and wherever I felt it. I un-welcomed myself. My sense of welcome was generic, and now it's specific. I'm free to choose who might welcome me or not.

The chicken and the egg came at the same time, until someone asked who came first, and the separation began. It didn't matter who started it. In their separation, the chicken and the egg got the chance to look at each other. In the beginning, being and all beings were not separate, and then they were. We're given thought by our separation, so we can see the differences, and release those differences in seeing how illusory they are. The absolution of my separation from myself frees me from feeling separate from others. Welcome at home in myself, I can't feel unwelcome anywhere, unless the circumstantial evidence is clear.

Today, I feel unwelcome in this café. Nothing tells me I'm unwelcome, and yet I want to apologize for my presence. This is the separation I imagine, to see what its parts are. There are parts to the abstracted, intangible unknown, if we're keen to see them. I look at a row of trees, and I know the blue behind them is not part of the branches, like paint in a painting. From where I sit, it's hard to tell the difference. If I focus on one color or another, I can name it, separate from the rest. This effort in naming the differences between god and man, between tree and sky, between feeling the welcome and the unwelcome of the day, keeps me from having to take a step toward

its resolution. I'm resolved in stepping back into myself. I step back where I'm welcome. To feel unwelcome is my effort outside who I am. I use this sense of unwelcome to recognize the pain of the illusion of separation.

The Destiny of the Moment

I thought my brother's pessimism would pull me in like the Mafia does a family member. His loveable heart makes his isolation and distrust appealing, but my answer is my own. I'm no more a member of any society than I am of any offshoot it rejects. My brother lives in a world outside himself and his home is a retreat from it. There may be a conspiracy in the world he's wise to, but I believe I'm free from that conspiracy, unless I hide in its closets and pull knives on its intruders. The rich and powerful gather among their own. They control the cost of something. They affect the success of something. But here, in my chair, I control the destiny of the moment.

I've seen the constructions of time brought down by a loving embrace. This heart of mine has lived in its glory with no help and no hindrance from others. It taps the constant wealth that the wealthy dream of, that the powerful can't reach in their patterned practices. Some few among them might sit in a similar chair, but here, in this unreachable chair, I reach for nothing. And it's given to me to dwell in nothing with nothing missing. No salesmen call, no threat is felt, no promise has sway. Here, in the heart of the heart, I am the unseen one, and I see better for it. I'm the suicide bomber of the idea of separation. I hold the key to heaven in my empty, open hands.

The Streets are Crowded with the Clothed

I am alone. I have no designs on the world. This is my deathbed confession, made before the inevitable moment, a kind of mortality announcement. I have no designs on the love of a woman, either. Those designs have run parallel to my designs on the world. I'm neither dead, nor about to be. I haven't been castrated or consigned to a monk's denial. I'd be happy to accept the presence of these things for which I have no design. It's the addiction of these designs I disown. Wine is not the problem for a drunk but his relationship with the wine is. I've driven my square self toward a round hole, or thought I should. I come from a long line of round pegs. I should've been able to round myself to fit where others have fit. This is a moment of acceptance, to lay down the mantle I coveted, if only in imitation of every other king. I am the naked emperor I saw in the mirror that passes for a

window, and the streets are crowded with the clothed.

Chronicles of Stillness

When I say I'm alone, to whom do I speak, when by the nature of speaking, I'm not alone? We're an exchange of listeners. These words are the chronicles of stillness. The quietest words are listening words. I listen to what speaks within to hear what can't be said. Trying to speak silence reveals the effort of speaking. This effort betrays a similarity with those who speak to a meaning. I listen for the voice of listening. I look to see the eyes that witness. To look in the world is to look to a purpose. To witness is to receive with my eyes.

My body is prepared for action or it's at peace in the fullness of its being and the readiness to act. In a world of doing, there's no loss in being a witness, and there's no loss in being aware of those who feign stillness. Those who pose at peace listen for the time of their self-assertion. However, to witness one's own being is unknown and unpredictable. To be compelled by the force of my being is to live in the license of life.

The Calm That Caused It

The wind is at rest at its source, Aolis emerges from a cave of calm. Undefined by what I become, I fall into a turbulence and claim its deepest identity as my own. I demand inhalation, and exhalation marks my way. In the stillness between breaths, I look back and forth across the gap, until I no longer distinguish myself from either side. I fall into the center of my unregulated being. There's an identifying kindness in what I am, in a room of others, without knowing or needing to know who anyone says they are. In order to place myself among others, I share a delight in their variety. In the wind, is the calm that caused it. No cause you say? It's just as well. In the calm is the wind it causes. No cause you say? It's just as well.

The Dogs of the Desert

Pulled over beside the road in the dark, the crunch of gravel gives way to the night. I listen for the howling of beasts. Quiet fills my ears like water fills compartments of a submerging submarine. I sink to the earth, below everything that moves in the fearless peace. Here, where the road runs by like memory and desire, at ease with the engine off, with nothing running

but the heart, my blood moves in its course, everything is within reach, and nothing lies outside such silence, on this night beside the road in the desert's dark embrace. The dogs of the desert come out of the desert at dawn. I attribute love to being with those I live among. I start the car and regenerate the gravel. On the road, again, I see I'm still the same as when I'm crowded together in love.

The Grace of Another's Need

She needed me, and I turned away, unsure of my place in her need. Unwilling to show her need, she turned away from my attention and was gone from the moment. I was helpless to taste the grace of her need. In our abundance, we make our need unnecessary and unwelcome, even as we turn our attention to the devastated and the dying. I imagine a look in her eyes that might grant a way to the interior, a reaching outside of care for its companion in the kindness of needing another's kindness. Having no need for need is another deprivation, when we might open our need to its own place in our happiness. Self-strength holds no door for kindness. Being kind is sidelined to noisy charity.

An old woman sits with another old woman in the quiet of their age, and love abides. In our emergence, in the peculiar prosperity of life, nature drops us into degrees of ourselves we're willing to avoid. I see what seemed of little use, in the practice of a common kindness, in not rushing to the aid of infirmity and weakness, but in our being with each other in calm regard. I offer my heart, in its humility, to inherit the earth of any other open, humble heart.

What's Not for Sale at Such a Price

Practical considerations take the place of everything in its wake. One goes looking for a missing thing and ends up organizing the house. When a man's business burns down, his heart may be brought to zero, to no longer go where his business keeps him apart from himself. Considerations don't care for the dissolution of concern or the need to be alone with no business to conduct. I suggest my friend make a business of the movement of human bodies, directing them back to stasis and impulse, as if he were a lawyer, hanging out his shingle.

I realize my mistake, to propose a place of commerce for the shaping of breath, the inventory of muscle, the autobiography of blood, and the encouragement of flight. I knew it when he said, "Well, you and I..." It woke me. I'd been talking to him as if I were giving myself bad advice, calling the cadence for a march into the commercial and the practical. Walking off into the dawn, with no map of the east, is the only function of the real; the rest is concern for consideration. We succeed, when we fail to advertise what's not for sale, at such a price.

The Calendar of Creation

The sun's glare has a character of its own. It glints and reflects. It highlights and washes away. The hillside loses depth of color, burnt away in the brightest light. Points of fire mark the corners of metal roofs. People lower their brims and consider their misplaced faith in destiny. The young have time to let their lives play, under the sun of their destiny, but destiny washes away the moment of life, draining its color when its glare burns, overhead, or in the reflection of a mirror. The absence of destiny also has character, turning my silhouette to shadow, to a reflection in a cloudy glass. I no longer see myself outside myself.

The sun of my being is within who I am, with no orchestration or expectation, where nothing is bound to occur, and nothing prevents anything from being or coming. It is the unknown, rich with the not yet known. Destiny organizes the journey toward its arrival. A destiny of having nothing destined does the same. A destiny of having no destined day opens the day to itself. I'm destined to this moment. Something destined tells me I am. The best destiny is hindsight among the wonders of the day, when whatever is still to come, is lit by the returning sun, and nothing is named by the calendar of creation.

The Praise of Present Joy

Unfamiliar with what we're not, we walk out of ourselves, displaced by change. We walk in rubble, looking for what survives. So little changes, in a world of unceasing change. Kick us out, burn us down, destroy the present as past, the barren future is closer to the bone than what we've been or done. A woman's thick hair lifts in the wind around her head, like an island rising out of the sea. She gets in her car and buckles up, checks the traffic, and pulls into the road.

Change hones us to our essential selves. Any true change is an increase in clarity. A man leaves his heater on a mattress, a small world burns to the ground, and dozens are thrown out of a kind of home. Nothing of the certain is lost in destruction, like a fraction of war, some people wander, lost in themselves, sometimes until death, but the kindness of our greatness lives on. We bear our losses to a painful advantage, even in death, that never-ending cleaner of lives. Masterpieces burn, and we invent the charred art of what's burned in memory, where nothing we fancy is little more than present in our presence of mind. When we celebrate what's to come or what came before, even in our distraction, we let loose the praise of present joy.

The Roar of the Ant Lion

My body falls into itself, to be drawn back to its periphery by nearly impossible forces, but nothing can prevent its ultimate dissolve. The ant lion digs a hole and hides beneath the pit. It leaves its pincer the only part showing, until passing ants lose ground to the center, caught and devoured by the waiting predator. If the prey escapes the jaws of the ant lion, trying to climb the precipitous walls of the sand pit, the ant lion casts showers of sand to dislodge its climb, until the hapless climber falls helpless to its demise. My brother and I talk about our father as if we might defame or insult him, as if he were here in the next room, and not gone these many years, forever.

When our father died, I imagined his sudden absence like an erasure; his rich and colorful character erased like memory, the way wood is forgotten by fire. If a man's mind can lose its own storage, where is his presence in the body? The shape we give our formless being belies our periphery; there is no edge to us. Everything I forget of my father is not what remains. We were parts of one being, broken apart by time and space. I cherish his being, when nothing of his shape remains.

I feel compelled to let myself go, as I've done with my father. I hold him in effigy, as long as I hold myself in time. Twins enter, dressed as unlike as strangers. What conjoined reality there is between them is unexpressed. Only their difference is noticeable. We're all of us twins of the inexpressible, yet we cling to our difference, making outfits of our singularity. I die not away from my father but toward him. I only mimic his character in my transient, fantastic existence.

Pulling the Heads Off Grasshoppers

Driving across the roof of the world is the same as driving across its floor. Over the pass, through the valley, I feel a certain sadness in the falling rain. Something in the body tells me of something else. I come home over the same ridge that thrills me when I see it from my house, now in the distance. Riding the back of the ridge, it carries no distant thrill. A man in the wilderness pulls the head off a grasshopper, pulls its stomach with it, cooks and eats a delicacy of necessity. I drove many miles to stand in line next to someone I know. The back of my hand has become familiar topography. To know myself is to know what no longer needs to be known. I move to the known of the unknown and then leave that behind. Attention no longer goes to learning the unfamiliar heart. What's sure no longer requires training in dangerous terrain.

Being with a certain lover was driving faster than wise, attuned to a fearful anticipation, a false excitement, learning too rapidly what didn't need to be learned, like being on foot in the desert without a way of return. Experience teaches its own eager history of self. Falling back into the speed of being present in life, with the past at ease with itself and the future quietly silent, time opens its pages for perusal, for reading by moonlight. Experience becomes kindling in a fire that tells the beasts to keep their careful distance. It tells my heart to rest. Time has no anxious anticipation, fear folds into itself, and what remains lies at the ready, a light behind the night.

Between Cups

"This coffee is good," I think, and draw it down my throat in a warm suffusion, feeling the rich, bitter taste heat its way into my physical mind, like diving into the coffee, swimming in its flavor and its bite, and then, between swallows, almost forgetting the immersion. In between cups of being in love, wondering what it tastes like, what it feels like to be swallowed by what I take into my body. The thought of loving one person opens the memory of loving someone else. One attempts to embrace the future with the arms of the past, leaving the present dressed in borrowed images.

People are coming to my door. It won't be long before my house is packed with others. There's been no invitation, no strung lights, no horns trumpeting. I come home to myself, after wandering in the far regions. No one comes to

call when I'm away, but here, at home in myself, I receive calls and callers. I'm stopped on the street. I see footprints in the soft earth. I reach out, by having hands not holding anything tight in their grip. I laugh in my sleep, when five cowboys have their cocks in the wringer, flat and wide like red rugs, like wide, flat tongues, and none of them is mine.

Knowing One's Place

Wisdom is reluctantly, then happily told, like a loving story discovered in the cold moment apparently only occupied by avatars and death. Speaking of it is not its best example, nor is celebration its foundation. Being at ease with death, with no promise of anything else, is the best celebration of wisdom, and there's nothing to say about that. I work my way through life to that final freedom. As the struggle to understand subsides to acceptance, there's no more need to explain and illustrate the struggle. Acceptance has no handbook. Peace is the show of wisdom, and stillness is its demonstration. Sit in one place long enough, and essence will reveal itself. The essential will make itself one's teacher. Students seek it out, hoping for someone to show them a seat in themselves.

Nostrils Flare in the Vigorous Air

It's a mountain wind that blows in the bright sun that takes nothing from the life of the body. Like being near a rocky wall or glacial waters, it leaves the clean edge of seeing things for what they are, with nothing in the air to cloud the senses. Pollution creates texture of a different beauty. My brother's friend drove him to a ridge above the city, with a vast panorama spread below and beyond, in a valley thick with the exhalation of millions. "Look how beautiful it is," his friend said, indicating the stagnant sky with a sweep.

The setting sun lit the crowded canvas of purple, red, orange and yellow, a conflagration of unnatural riches for the eye's parochial imagination. How beautiful is our crowded, private sky, when no crisp wind blows away unmixed thoughts.

In the feelings of our accumulated days, we thicken ourselves to a kind of beauty, until it's what we see. It becomes where we see greatness, and even our alarms become artfully designed. Books are written and cultures defined, faces see beauty in their kind. What's born of what we love bears us to another generation. The more we add, the more we claim for ourselves.

Nothing, within what we think we are is strange. We even make a home in our conflicted air for everything we say we're not. It's a bracing wind that blows in the brilliant sun that takes nothing away from the mind or the body. Nostrils flare in the vigorous air, and the sky is freshly seen for the home of beauty, unclouded by its residue.

Brought Down by Pebbles and Thorns

My brother says he cannot wait to die and "get this nonsense over with." It seems a cover for what he really means. It's as ironic as saying, "I hate women," meaning "I love them so much I can't stand it." He would love his life to death, if he could. We're brought down by pebbles and thorns. I'm skeptical about imagination, especially my own. I can't act out its alternate reality. This life won't bend to my ideas, unless I leave it alone. The more I leave myself alone, the more my life evolves inside itself to better me with what I can't control. The less I try to control what I care more about, the better off I am. I care most for what opens me to caring.

When my son was four, I was a parent assistant in his day school. Another parent saw the concern on my face. She said I was anticipating. She said I should simply watch what was happening. There was no need to carry anxious expectation into the moment of his play. In the unstructured moment, I found myself free to love him, feeling more caring than before.

My brother says that to touch a woman is almost worth his life. But, he says, they ask too much. He won't do what they want. He thinks he might be "queer," since he won't sacrifice his life for a woman's rules. There's truth in what he says, in his mind, and in the ways of the world. We're brought down by pebbles and thorns. Some men think women are rule makers for men, unless he rules them and makes rules of his own. Then he's twice ruled. To live aware of the rules, but beholden to none, is to live free of the way we rule and are ruled by ourselves and each other. The imagination imagines mastery or magic. The reality of freedom imagines nothing but what is.

The Joy of Being Seen

Raised unseen in the way we're all raised, I learned to be seen for the masks I wore. I learned to live in the pains and pleasures of being seen, not for myself, but for what I might project of myself. I learned to be seen for what I was in the eyes of others, until I began the pursuit of being seen for true, by

god and man and myself, to reveal the real within. I saw myself in the eyes of the inherent, where there's no seer and no seen but in being, but my ancient habit of not being seen for true limited the time and place of this revelation. I sought to be seen as the unseen self, but the unseen has no sight in familiar eyes.

My unshown face had no self in the masquerade of meeting others, so I began to trust the act of simple nakedness, what I once took for the face of love in others, to accept love as the easy absence of masks. I sought to accept the pleasure of being seen in the lovemaking of my naked masquerade. To be unmasked of the lover's model is to accept only what can be seen by the unseen in all of us, beneath and beyond what we wear as ourselves.

I think of the one I have loved who was afraid of being naked. I thought her nakedness could have become the absence of a mask. I thought her nakedness might have begun the time of no more masks, but she was unprepared to be unafraid of that revelation. The joy of being seen begins in the terror of being seen, no matter how thin the veil.

The Armies of Lesser Thought

A woman, with whom I had the most difficulty, has found another with whom she's at ease, and an anchor has risen from the deep of my waters. Some man has taken my place in my mind, freeing it from the file of failure I keep, whenever I think I'm untrue to my being. This habit of mind, to make a thing done badly of what could never be, haunts the mind that makes it. Three parts of the ghost live on, in its habit, in the mind that carries it, and in making a whole from no part of it.

My place, in any place that has no place for me, becomes a persistent ghost of its imagined self. In the greater of this lesser reality, is the force of being a creature of the mind, to make of myself an entity and cling to that belief, and then to imagine my place among others, as if these occurrences had substance, like a rocky outcropping imagined into the prow of a ship.

In relationship to others, bound by the names of shapes, I construct fortifications of thought, to be manned by armies of even lesser thought. Or I live in the reality of what's real, and happiness blossoms in the light. I grin at the news of a difficult lover's new life, and my chest swells with new

breath. I'm free again, as I've always been, even when we were together. I see how bound I am to the pretense of these rocky ships of imagined love. The false glue of desire binds its objects together in this self-imagining realm of relative realities.

Returning the Favor

I heard a strange scraping sound, while I was driving. I thought it was the load shifting in the back of my truck. I realized it was a flat tire, warping on the pavement. I pulled into a brightly lit service station, and tried to dislodge the spare tire from its space beneath the bed of the pickup. It wouldn't budge. A friendly guy stepped up to me, as I was lying on the ground, and suggested I inflate the tire. I took his advice, thanked him, and drove home, to work on the tire in the morning. When I did, I saw the tire wasn't flat, it was only leaking, slowly.

The next day, I drove to the tire store that fixes flats, and they removed a thin brad, not even a nail. The bar I use to crank the spare tire down from its storage area became stuck and wouldn't work. I realized I didn't need to use the spare. One could say I was prevented from doing what I didn't need to do. "Thank you, Jesus," I said, to no one in particular, including Jesus. I like living in the world of magical thinking, beholden to a kindly universe, overseen by concerned spirits, like neighbors looking out for each other, like a friendly guy in a brightly lit gas station.

I'd like to do an angel a favor, this afternoon, to return the favor. It seems only fair. One can consort with gods, if that's how you choose to live your life, but if you want to be free, it's not enough. Still, it will do for most of us. Being free is letting go of everything and then letting go of that. It's not the sort of thing that makes a drama out of one's inconvenience.

On the other hand, it allows for the full pleasure in the moment. The guy who told me about the air pump behind the gas station said my situation was the sort of thing that could make a man angry. I said I wasn't angry, and that was true. I was having a good time with a small mystery, lying on the ground, with my arm up under the spare tire, looking for the slot for the bar that releases the spare. Letting go of everything does wonders for its enjoyment. Thanking the gods, afterwards, is only common courtesy for the heart of the mind.

I Am What I Seem to Be

The sky is a deep blue, over gray, not swirled but layered to a blend, like a family of colors posing for the photographer. The resemblance between them is almost a copy. Distinct in their moods, these fathomable colors allow me in their fold. I am one among them, where I'm not defined as a man, and I'm not here, as I seem. My reality is a curious mixture of the energy that defines life and the history of every being who's ever lived. Because I'm born as something defined as separate, I can be said to die, but I'm the very shape of an illusion, so artfully done it appears real.

Anyone can say the same, but it's a conclusion few accept. I've come to it reluctantly, even though I've known it for a long time. One could say lifetimes, but I won't. That construct doesn't interest me. I only say it now. I finally cannot avoid saying it. The only way out of this trap of claiming to be something personal, the way one says, "I this," and "I that," is to tell the truth about who "I" is. "I" is a solid illusion, like a thing conjured out of the ether, physically recognizable, but born from the least physical reality. Instead of saying I'm mostly molecules in space, I say I'm space in molecular form.

I'm not a ghost, an apparition, a visitor from another dimension, an angel, a demon, a fraud, a trick, a phantom, a zombie, a presence, or a vision. I'm a human being. We've decided, among ourselves, to call ourselves human beings. We are people, as flesh and blood, piling definition upon definition, until we're satisfied that we are physical entities worth believing in. We elevate death, because we can't believe we're not permanent fixtures of solidity, like animated statues with a heart.

I have imagined appearing on stage as this formless being, but there is no greater stage for this portrayal than the one I walk in, every day. I remember being in school, taking part in bull sessions about life being illusion. It was great fun to tease ourselves with the idea, but it was another thing to begin to accept it as true. Punch me to test my belief in illusion, and I'll punch you back. This illusion is quite solid, for the duration of its short time in physical form, and I don't like anyone's ignorance acting like an asshole. We fade in and out of form. Call it birth and death, if you wish. I like this changing body that I've known through a lifetime, and I will continue to cherish it, but I don't entrust it to be the source of my awareness.

Being Wonderful Together

Young people move with each other into this or any other place, feeling their youthful presence like a conjoined entity. They may attribute the sense to the place. Whatever place they enter, they enter in a kind of agreement of spirit. They become attached to the effect of their consciousness. This is the ego of the spirit, loving how it lives, falling in love with itself, falling in love with its companions, falling in love with everything.

Later, when we differentiate ourselves, we think fondly of other times and places, of people we knew, then and there, or we think fondly of ourselves as we once were, and we neglect to realize that the wholeness we felt was a delicious pact. It was a pact of the spirit of being who we were together. We're still rich in that spirit.

We can open our ego to an even greater state of recognition, where the spirit remains, but taking it personally doesn't remain. I fall in love by an espresso machine, and forever after, I'm a lover of espresso machines and everything related to them. To be in one's consciousness, with the fullness of awareness, is to be in church with a love of God that's greater than the church and the same as God's love. Our possibility is not to fall out of love by leaving the church, but to fall deeper into it, by opening to a greater spirit than any place can define. Our opportunity is not to look at any place of worship from the inside or the outside, but to look at it from no side at all.

In the Window Seat

"Sit in one place, long enough, and the whole world will come to your door," I once said to myself, sitting in the front window seat of a café in San Francisco. It made sense that the world would cross that threshold of the world, eventually. But the truer axiom is, "Be in one place, long enough, and the whole world will come to be who you are." Each of us is the enactment of the world. I'm a one-person show of this endless reality. Just as everyone else is. I wasn't sure I could handle the contrary figures who passed in front of my eyes, inside my heart. I became less sure, as I looked at each one's inner passage. We're difficult strangers to ourselves, beautiful and amazing. It's hard to stay open to characters whose appearance brings fear and hurt. A couple kisses by a car. I imagine her telling him, "I want you to hold me and let me go." Stay in one place, long enough, and the world will be revealed as who you are, until you're filled with what you see. You begin as the seen

and not the seer, until you become the seer and not the seen. What passes on the outside, passes on the inside, and what passes is not what remains.

I Write Poetry

Today was as warm as early summer. It reminded me why I might live in the islands. The island air is transcendental. It warms what may have gotten cold. It heats the cold the young are willing to brave. It heats the cold the old have no more interest in braving. Like swimming in warm water, the outside temperature approaches the inside temperature, enough to change the relationship from challenge to complicity. When I first went to the islands, many years ago, I told my brother, who was living there. "All you people talk about is what's fun to do and what's good to eat." He stared at me as if to say, "What's your problem?"

During that visit, thirty years ago, I went to hear a famous poet read his poems on the north shore, on a dark and stormy night. After his reading, an old farmer, waiting to speak to him, asked him, "What do you do?" and the poet said, "I write poetry," and the old man repeated, "No, I mean, what do you do?" and he answered, "I write poetry." I was thrilled to my core as a young man who wanted to believe himself a poet and still become one.

The Greater Reality is Their Mother

A light rain falls on a cool night after a warm day. My face is warm and red, after a couple of hours in the sun. My eyes are dry, as if from lack of sleep. A muscle in my right forearm aches, as if from a blow during the game. What I remember is the drama of another man's injury. He went down on his side, holding his knees, just as the professionals do when they fake an injury to draw the referee's attention. This man rose to his knees, with his head on the ground, just as the floppers do. He tried to stand, just as those in their melodramas do. He was helped off the field, as if the entire episode was scripted, except this one wasn't.

I was looking at a real thing as if it might be a fake. I've seen fakes acted as real. It was impossible to tell the difference, even when the man came back in the game, after sitting for a while, then as he walked gingerly on the sidelines, then as he rode a bike around the field to loosen the injury. He showed me his bony knee where the cushion of muscle and fat had been worn down, over the years. The blow had struck him on almost bare bone,

but there was no bruise and no wound to be seen. My eyes will clear up overnight, the ache will go away, the redness will subside, my body heat will return to normal. I'll live to play another day, still not knowing what is real and what is not real. Each is the twin of the other. The greater reality is the only real in which they both occur.

My Teacher and Myself

An old man, born in an ancient society, grows up as part of it. His ancient self teaches him about his recent arrival as a particular person. His antiquity is as present to him, as his diabetes is. The dirt under his feet has been pounded free of passing events. He looks on those who come to his country as delightful dreams. He sees their essential spirit. Nothing else has enough presence to matter. A man born in a young country stays young. His ancient self waits for him to settle into his history. The dirt under his feet is as fertile as young flesh. He sees the transient beauty of his transient land, until wandering, as if in a dream in an ancient land, his eyes meet the eyes of the old man who laughs like a boy in the mirror of the young man's own ancient self.

From poles of the world, these two points converge on a dirt street in the dirt heart. Underneath our feet is the unity of our ancient blood. One midwife, in bright colors, sees a thousand babies born. She refuses to name them, until she sees them walk the dirt beneath their feet.

Caverns of Delicate Intricacy

After a long spell of chilling cold, in the midst of a heavy fog, the town woke to a sparkling scene, with every tree's branches covered with a delicate white fur of frost, with car antennas, plants, and power lines coated, the streets appear as caverns of delicate intricacy. There must have been a breeze that lifted the frost to these angles, individual branches are coiled in white, extending a million white wings, and dreary history is transformed to beauty. The dirty face of unbroken cold is coated with fresh white, its cheeks powdered, its charm restored.

The gravity of being has a greater endurance than my epiphanies do. I fall in love and out of love. I blame nothing or no one for dragging me down to my cold condition. I retire to the familiar. To live in love's long epiphany is to accept the spontaneity of the endless unknown, a perilous perfection. The

fog, at night, dulls the newly wonderful catastrophe, but its beauty remains in place, until morning, and another century of miracles follows the dawn.

In Simple Grace

A barefoot worker came to our rooms to clean. He swept the apartment with a short, natural broom. Silent, light, swift, in no hurry, with the movement of a dancer, without excess, he finished the job, picking up the wispy debris with his fingers. Collecting the scraps of refuse, he elevated a mundane task to its beauty. It wasn't work, or a performance for reward, it didn't demean his station, it undefined him from caste or caricature. Lifting the detritus of our rooms with his long, narrow fingers was not an act of simple grace.

It was simple grace performing an act. It could have been any other act in its place. He was a man in whom grace occurred. It lifted me to wonder itself, nameless, pointless, indescribable, and now I've lessened it to details, as if it was something that happened. A photograph, or these words, might seem picturesque or the telling of another culture. One can't claim the moment by describing it. It's better to forget everything but simple grace, without a graceful thought to take its place.

The Romance of Reality

The Colors

The trees on the far hillside are crystallized to a glacial white. A brief time has painted the landscape epochal. We've begun to live past this winter by living through it. Endurance begins to reveal finer qualities than the topical might reveal. Subtleties appear in what seemed an unbroken sheet of subsistence. What we live through has its events and faces, and we describe ourselves by their association. We love a particular place, because that's where something good happened, or something bad, but the character of our time isn't revealed by its chronological details.

We are more, in what seems less. I've been to the beach, the sea, the jungle, the mountains. I've lived an anecdotal life in the acquaintance of men and women of a thousand masks, but here in the seeing that doesn't come and go, I am without a story to tell. Even when I tell a story of my time passing through this life, there's no separation at the heart of being in life itself, and the colors of the story gradually brighten.

Beauty Accumulates to Calamity

The beauty of the recent frost accumulates to calamity. The fog that sits in the valley begins to burden lines and branches. Everything hangs in the balance, waiting for worse. A rancher walks his fence, clearing the frost from the electric lines, so his bulls won't run the range. They hear the coyotes howling at night. People continue to kill each other, as we continue to fortify our insanity. We forbid aggression and then reward it. We elevate existence to the sacred, and then debase it. We kill to maintain the illusion of our benevolent sanctity.

An atmosphere of dull dread hangs in the air, like a barometric prison. It is the unhappiness of molecules that live inside the acceptance of cruelty that's practiced in the name of what we honor. No one is threatened until the knife is at his or her throat. The prevention of assault occurs before its attempt. Too late for the cure, we make retaliation mandatory. The foolishness of willfulness is circular. No one wins when anyone thinks of winning. No one wins in any of the wars between my selves, until winning has no more credibility than losing.

The Greatness of a Quiet Life

A young woman with half vacant eyes speaks, and her voice is a monotone that cuts through the varied and modulated conversations around her. She sits with her friends and talks on the phone. Outside, the ghostly gray, ice-coated scene casts the valley in a display like grandmother's crystal. I joined the soccer team of my new university, years ago, after years being idle. I played until I was exhausted.

That first Friday night, drinking wine, I pissed blood. The next morning, in pain, after pissing blood again, I went to the public hospital. The emergency room was filled with the wretched refuse of the weekend. I sat in a chair next to a bloody hushpuppy, an empty shoe with its own pool of blood. For an hour, I couldn't get a doctor's attention. When I did, I was told to drink water for the next two hours, but the pain, excruciating and unrelenting, doubled, as if moved from back to front. After another hour, lying on a fluoroscope table, I thought, "If I have to die to end this pain, that's OK with me."

It was a simple recognition of the truth. I didn't die. The stone that blocked my kidney dissolved of its own accord. I walked out of the hospital, grateful for knowing another simple reality that death is not difficult to accept. I had wanted the pain to come to an end, and death was a fair method. At the game this morning, a thirteen-year-old boy from India, who has taken a liking to me, came to my side and put his arm against mine, touching his skin to my skin. These small moments are the greatness of a quiet life.

Failed to the Future

I thought of saying to her, "If I can't be with you, then who could I possibly be with?" It was a rhetorical question without an answer. I imagined her to be the perfect partner for the perfect partner I thought I might have been for her. Beyond that perfect balance, there seemed to be no alternative. This is where imagination gets to be true to its peculiar nature and not to the nature of any greater reality. This is where the forms that we crowd our emptiness with, prove useless. The blessing of failure is leaving the path uncluttered with habit.

My friend is an occasional painter with no object for his art. He paints whatever comes to the surface in the painting, on what seems like a canvas

whose depth of field is only surface. His friend, a sculptor, who works from form, to draw his vision of beauty, asked him where he got his images, and he had no answer. His images come from his not knowing. He tells me he's curious who I might end up with, assuming I might end up with anyone. In a world of comparative forms, I seem, finally, to have used up the forms of my imagination. What seemed perfect in my imagination has shown itself to be perfect for the imagination. In reality, I've been failed to the future. Any success that follows this time won't be called a success of will. It will have succeeded from nothing but the art of its own reality.

Staying in Bed for a Month

Despite the natural beauty of the earth, a pall of lethargic winter has fallen across the land. Instead of fighting it, it feels wiser to let it carry the day. I once told my lover that I felt like staying in bed for a month. She said, "Will you still talk to me?" I was so surprised, my depression lifted. Now I have no lover to prod my joy to the surface. These days, the woman I loved so briefly is no longer available for reflective advice, as a friendly mirror or the kind of comfort an embrace might afford. I can only offer myself my own bed with an offer to listen.

I'm not feeling joyful in a joyless panorama. The beauty around me can't give me comfort in my feelings. The beauty of my surroundings does not embrace me. It ranges beyond my arms. It uplifts my wonder but not my heart. Chicken soup is more effective in soothing the needs of my emotions than truth and beauty seem. I know I'm not the body I care for. I carry it about, until carrying it feels like it's carrying me. But when I'm kind to my body, it doesn't feel as if I'm carrying it, along with the bed in which it lies.

An Ear-Flap Hat

The only character of God that doesn't lessen God is the witness who takes no part in what occurs. God is the divine absence we want to clothe from the deep closet of our ideas. When I dress myself in the ideas I have about myself in the world, I risk losing awareness. An old man sits in the corner with his coffee and cell phone, wearing a flap-eared hat. I could easily imagine him the god of my story, a scarecrow to hang my old clothes on. I could make him a judge I court for his rejection or his acceptance. I could do these things and more, if I wanted to put myself in the whirlwind.

One wants to follow the emotional heart to its strongest feelings, to thoughts of its weather, to want to know what's happening across the state. The old man's truck broke down. He says so in a loud voice. If I begin to pity him or honor him, I will continue the courtship of judgment. The center doesn't sit in judgment of what circles it. Nor is it blind to what flies out from its grounded peace. My mind wants to brave the highway of this old man's travail, regardless of his need for pity or honor.

Attached to Love

Wonderland has begun to fade. Some of the frost on the trees has fallen. The streets carry a soft coating of soot. On the other side of the world, a child is born to my child, and ancient genes will pass to another generation. No name has been given to him, but they say he looks like Dwight Eisenhower on a bender.

Years ago, my companion, who was in China, asked me, long distance, if I missed her. I said I didn't, but the more we spoke, the more I did. Separation doesn't take anything away but the presence of the one I might love. When that presence is rejoined, I'm no longer separate, and my love is rejoined with it. If everyone I know were to die, and the door opened to another room of others, I would begin again, to love whoever I might come to love. This is no slight to the love I feel for those I love, but a nod to the absence of love's attachment. I'm attached to love itself, and then to those I love, and not to the manipulations of love.

When I die, I want those who love me to let loose any attachment they feel toward me, in favor of the love in their nature. I want them to love again, and often, wherever love occurs. I want them to love me still, when it occurs, and to let go of feeling attached. We're not bound by love, love doesn't bind us, and we don't make ourselves alone in having no attachment. When the face of love comes again and stays, it's not a sign of precious bondage but a deep reverberation of eternity. That personally felt, undefined love is nameless, and present, and closer than any attachment.

The Camaraderie of Desire

From ego, we make the art, drama, music, and literature of our angst, fears, and dreams. From the centrism of the ego, we're concerned with the transcendence of, and the salvation from, fear, confusion, and doubt. We

speak in the common language of our resignation. The freest prisoner never leaves the prison. His example satisfies the rest of the prison population, who are safe to stay at home in prison, where the best are loved for their torment, loss, and temporary triumph. I sit in an egocentric room, making conversation, but I leave the room behind, when I realize that staying is to join the camaraderie of struggle, defeat, and desire, in a place where I cannot pray without asking for something. I'm answered in my prayers when I no longer ask for freedom or a better place in prison, but for my place in the limitless and unbounded moment of being in life itself.

The Gods of Our Fathers

The sun is shining in the valley, burning the cover from the spirit. Atheists are in the news promoting reason as the antidote to religion, substituting the belief system of mind for the belief system of the faith of the mind. Neither system risks being in the essence, without constructs. Every paradigm rests on the same unknown. One system of thought seeks to understand it. Another system of thought seeks to believe an understanding of it. Neither system seeks to be what that unknown is.

In being itself, there is no knowledge to be had or to be given. The quarrel between believers and non-believers is a fight between sects of the human mind to stake out the unknown as territory for human consciousness. Both are threatened by the essential reality, which has no stake in either form of the formless. Nothing explains or encompasses existence but existence itself. The grandchildren of the gods of every religion are having the same quarrel, to know themselves, even while they resort to the mechanisms of their failure. Staring into the vast unknown, with neither reason nor faith, is the only cleansing of these failures. These failures are passed from generation to generation, in hopes they will convince their children of their final triumph.

A Good Boy in Church

I was a good boy in church, listening and remembering. I knew the stories; the lessons, the beliefs and the believing, but I never took any of it to heart. Like going to the movies, I enjoyed it while I was in it, but I took little of it home. This is the way we are. We take to be real what's already present in who we are, and the rest is of no particular interest, unless we can use it to our benefit or detriment. I loved my time in the honoring of grace, the adoration of stillness, the apparent appreciation of the least of these. I felt

accepted for my presence, even though it was simply for coming to the building that housed the profession of faith. I liked it that everyone was somehow special and not for our uniqueness. I assumed the love I felt was everywhere in life and wasn't defined by the denomination. And then I grew older.

I began to act, in that reality, the sense of an exclusive superiority for embracing a rigidity of thought. At the same time, I began to question what had been unquestioned. I didn't question the soft carpet and curved back of the pews, or the quiet rooms of contemplation and resonant peace. My granted posture of arrogance, shaking hands with the preacher, led me astray from the joy in stillness that I found welcome there. In a place where I was at home in spirit, I began to act out a position in the world, in a spirit that sought to make a name for itself.

What claimed to be true to my spirit, wasn't. I was drawn away from what claimed to be a home to my spirit. I went out to find my home in the undefined wonder beyond what had claimed it. I found my home in homelessness. I found what I thought I had found in church to be more at home beyond church. I let go of one place that claimed my spirit for its ubiquitous universality. The divine is that thing we have no name for, that we build houses for, that we name ourselves for, when its only recognition is in its irreplaceable and unknowable reality.

Religion is the Romance of Eternity

To link one's faith in existence to a book of stories is to live in the romance of life and not its reality. Any relationship of love that depends on romance denies its reality in favor of its shape and shadow. I choose to let go of the last vestiges of romantic life. As long as I cling to romance in any area, I see I'm bound to it in other areas, including the spiritual. When one is in love with love, the commercial professions of love have power. I see I have lived in the bliss of the born again, the bliss that depends on a relationship that's held in the heart, like a lover who showed up, one day and may or may not stay.

I choose to spend my time with what does not come and go, the way lovers do, the way ideas do, the way romance rises and falls, the way a soul can be lost and found; this is the romance of the spirit, like the romance of anything else. What's true is always true. What's always true is the unknowable

reality, beyond all understanding. I'm lost outside my own reality when I engage the romance of its pursuit. I've been living outside the romantic relationship of spirit, but I've lingered in romance in my heart for desired others. That lingering love of the ways of love has kept me in fear of spirituality, and it has kept me in love with spirituality. Romance is a delightful and devilish diversion from what's true. It has kept me from the truth of my reality.

I Chase Myself Down

I chase myself down to become who I am, not to become a part and call it the whole, or to play a role that feels good or right, but to clear away the layers, until my identity is identical to nothing but itself. I act on a crowded stage, with other actors jammed together in a small space, sending one after another off, until I see a drama with characters in dialog, in scene after scene of conflict and resolution, reduced to monologue, then splitting into dialog, then reducing to itself, again and again.

A narrator's voice seems useful. Then new characters appear, then nothing, a silence, stillness. Then the empty stage, then the character of space, then the presence of being and not being, all to discover the voice of emptiness, within which the play is written. To be alive is to listen for the voice that has no other voice competing with it, to hear the voice that stands alone without primacy, the voice of the aloneness at the center. To be alive is to hear the voice that remains when everyone's gone, when everyone, who might be listening, is embodied by darkness, to be the one who's left when everyone's gone home to their place in themselves.

A Seed in a Bowl

I'm a seed in a bowl that's larger than a man. I sit in this valley neither larger nor smaller than any other. I put my hand on my chest in a gesture of reconciliation. My contrition complete, I now know a joy as profound as sorrow. I wanted to be sober as long as I drank, and I passed that arbitrary demarcation. I chose to hold myself in abeyance during that long apprenticeship. I set the standard of my own release. It was a path I meant to walk, in order to arrive at the beginning, so I might let loose the angels of the time I spent with the spirits. To drink was to set free the angels of my heart, but they began to drown in the flood. To drink was to give permission to the freedom of the spirit, but that spirit became diluted with its shadow.

We try to free ourselves from any captivity. We try to do what we think will set ourselves free. We murder compassion in our escape. We strangle kindness. We whisper false joy. We dig ourselves deeper into the way out. We die in life. I forgive my failures, and I honor the angels of my failure. I lived in the apprenticeship of freedom, after living for just as long in the exile of false freedom. I'm at home, here, as I meant to be there. I've been away to the chaos of freedom, to come home to this peace.

Never Only a Life

To be in a room with my old desire is to feel the mind pulled to a crescent, a pincer of pain, of resurgent emotion. To be in a room with my old pain is to be in the open grave of the resurrected pleasure and pain of desire. The mind holds images of pleasurable pain like a passport to what no longer lives. To revisit the grave of pain is to resurrect its life, to prolong what's been shortened to the past. Life that depends on the resurrection of the dead is to bring forward what wants to recede to ground.

Jesus meant to say, I was never born, I never died, but he was taken to mean he was returned from the dead. To resurrect the dead keeps alive the pain of dying. To be born again denies the life that never dies. I can't stay in the room of the past. I can't hold the pain of desire and live. I leave the room of the pleasure of the pain of the desire of the past. I've never been to the grave. I'll never go there. This being has no need to be born, or die, or be born again. I live, in my being who I am, that is never only a life.

The Taste of Tea

I saw someone, who dared to be alive outside her history. I saw someone who flared to a flame and then returned to embers. There's no guarantee she'll ever come as alive. She's gone away from coming this way, and there's no way to say what she may do. Fields lie fallow, sleeping dogs awaken. I heard a man say, "I can't be alive all the time, I can't stay in this moment, not every moment. I want my old ways back. This life is too much for me. I let go of my dependencies, but I can't live alone like this." Sometimes, retreat gathers strength for an impossible journey. No good change is overwhelming when you've been in it long enough. Bliss and terror recede to a commonplace. Fear loses its fearfulness.

As layers fall away, nakedness feels stripped of its new clothing. One wants to dress again for winter. The sun seems suspicious. Healing heat blisters the skin, like frostbite. One's past wants to hide from the past. The cave of old misery haunts one like hibernation. The wolf is at the door, hungry to eat you alive. The taste of tea leaves the bag when the water is hot. The frost loosens its grip on the ground. A stubborn mother, slow to come to her parenthood, miscarries to postpone her possibility, or the unlikely becomes the inevitable, and the baby is born, crying its own special joy.

And My Love Did Not Leave Me

In a dream, my lover was like no other I'd ever known. The love was mutual, sensual, kind, a meeting of the spirit. Wrapped around each other, I was inside her. We made love with little discretion, in the company of others, who knew and approved of our lovemaking. As we made love, I acknowledged a friend of hers. Then a child came up to us. Everyone around us accepted us, as if our loving was a good thing for everybody. I was as grateful as I was thrilled. Love was an easy, quiet astonishment.

I said to her, "If we just met, and our lovemaking is only this one time, I'll be devastated if it didn't continue." It was a dream. It came and went. When I woke, I didn't feel the loss of my one-time love. I did feel the wonder of experiencing such a shared love, surrounded by acceptance, without contradictory feelings or fears.

My dream lover acted like the love of my life, and I woke feeling the love of my own life. I want to stay in this love, surrounded by acceptance, to be loved in my loving, without hiding my love from anyone. I lay in my own bed, alone, in love, with no loss or regret, and my love did not leave me.

I Wipe My Eyes With Words

I invite myself to this arrival, the way my eyes teach their tears. My shoulders shake like oxen shed their flies, their sweat, their yoke. I wipe my eyes with words. My father would retreat to the basement, when it was time to say goodbye to anyone he loved. His way of loving was to leave its expression. He couldn't show how much he loved anyone. Whenever anyone left, he was left behind, in hiding. I take up these habits, without having a habit for them. I teach myself, in speaking what I wasn't taught. I teach myself, in speaking what I never learned. I learn, by walking into the

faith of not knowing.

My life is a constant arrival where it's capable of always having been. I learned everything my father taught me. I learned what he never admitted he was teaching. I learned what he didn't know he knew. I learned the secrets his ignorance tried to mask. I learned his unseen self. I became the son of his failure. I became the son of his perfection.

The Frightened Lover

Winter fades to a dullness. No painter would come here for the light. The day wanders though itself like anonymity, without purpose, unchallenged, vaguely content. These are not bad days to be at peace, when peace appears in the absence of fervor. A circus strongman, in a surreal, deserted countryside, seethes with anger; until he kills a man who tried to be a lover to the woman he'd kept for himself. Any lover, in this long winter's landscape, is at a loss, but not beyond his sanity. Love born of the spirit walks quietly, until it meets a similarity.

The lover in my heart trims the soles of his shoes, until bare ground is underfoot, and the heart turns to its purpose in the passage of peace. The fertility of peace is underestimated, when pain and conflict stir the creative to new contemplations of pain and conflict. Peace is disguised by a shroud. We ask how any good can come of such a vast nothing. The last days of winter are flat, gray, and dead to the eye. One can feel the ground moving out of its own way.

Slender Limbs

My friend felt a disquiet, so he built a gallery in his studio, a compact room with a door, four walls, a few paintings, an open room, with slender limbs of trees across the top. To enter such an open room was an honor, to become one to whom art is revealed, to stand in the company of art, like those who meet at a small party, getting to know one another, in a room of love's possibility.

Feeling unsettled, he wakes in the night, and performs a motion meditation, that takes him into the life of the body. Then he sleeps, until he wakes for tea with his wife. He quotes Chesterton on the sense of something present in the room, neither coming nor going. He squints and gapes. He sprawls and

jumps. He contemplates a long room for poetry, where those interested in listening might gather, for those who speak to those who listen. He holds poems up to the light like fabric, like maps, like bones, like babies, like a handful of power. His movements tend toward dance. A piece of crumpled paper in the corner is a dance. Something needs to be out of place, for one to dance. Something needs to be asleep, for one to dance well. Nothing needs to be, for one to be.

The Eyes of Its Own Arrival

The hills are the bare backs of beasts, bears, and whales encrusted and frosted by time. The fruition of life is its own fulfillment. If one dwells on that being done, the difficulties outweigh the reality. If you choose a path that few others choose, you'll see others less welcoming of the choice. It's a pastime of common attention to live in a world that defines a choice that seems separate as an act of separation. I seek, by stepping aside, to bridge the separation I never sought, in the fulfillment of my inherent self. The organic doesn't reject the organ. Fulfillment raises itself to its own height. I look for recognition in the eyes of others, but the genuine is seen most clearly in the eyes of its own arrival.

Bound by the Genuine

What finally brings stature to anyone's reality is the same awareness that sought that reality. When one sees oneself in the flowering of one's seed, there's no more need to be honored by those who have no honor for it. When you decide, in this life, to become exactly who you are, to be true to what becomes true for you, to stand not apart but within, your iron filings line up in a stiff wind. You begin to be what you've always been. You begin what's begun and keeps beginning. You seem to make choices, even when you see that the choices make themselves.

Maturity gives us the freedom of our youth. Youth wants to realize its age. There's no happiness in remaining a child past the time of childhood or spending one's adulthood in the loss of innocence. We bring ourselves together. Everything we do is pretense, unless it's bound by the genuine. We find the genuine running through even our slightest pretense. We forgive the con in the conman when we see the man he more clearly is. There's something true in the least of us, something false in the most genuine. Sorting it out is the pastime of pretense among the pretenders. It is the

pastime of the genuine within ourselves, to find and be what remains. Time separates the genuine from the false and the false from the genuine. Time is empty in itself, but what remains fills that empty vessel beyond its shape.

The Inheritance

A woman works the muscles of the back of a man who's in pain. She recommends he get professional help. He bends over his chair, then crouches in a curl. My father would lean on the kitchen counter in pain, his eyes closed, silent in his suffering. It was then I learned the word "sacroiliac," an exotic term for a part of the body I was too young to understand. My father suffered symptoms of unhappiness. I was sure I would inherit them. He was a clinic in the patterns to be disregarded in one's search for mental health. Going to boot camp in imaginary illnesses, I became a hypochondriac, until I made a deal with the doctor.

"Doc," I said, "my symptoms go away on my way to your office. So let's do this: I'll make an appointment whenever something bad seems to be happening. I'll come in your office, wave to you, turn around, and go home. It'll save time and trouble for both of us." He didn't like the idea, so I stopped my visits altogether. I told a psychiatrist, "Dave, I come in here, week after week, and I make up stories to tell you, and you have nothing to say. It feels like I'm talking to myself." Then I told him I had decided to quit. As soon as I did, I felt better. He said I shouldn't do anything rash.

A boy is sitting with his father. The boy looks older than his father, or the father looks younger than his son. The boy tries to take the hat from his father's head. I decided I wouldn't be a seeker with my teacher, but his equal, until he asserted his authority. We were equals, in the most essential reality, but not in the reversal of our roles. I walked past my father when he was getting old, and I beat him to a pulp, in a split-second's thought. It was the first time I had ever imagined such a thing. I loved it that he was my father and I was not his. I left him to his own devices, and he died like a saint, wise and strong in his dying.

A Concern for the Sun

A grandfather teaches his grandson to play chess. The boy props his chin on the chessboard to watch the pieces move. Two young women converse. One is pretty, and the other is aware how pretty she's made herself. A young man

is reading a textbook the size of a big city phonebook. People begin to talk of spring. The sun begins to make its presence known.

She gave me a hug that said, “Stay right where you are.” She told me she’d had a dream about my heart. She was concerned enough to call me, but we ran into each other instead, like the passing strangers we never stopped being. Our familiarity is the only reliable tool we have in getting to know each other. Anything more than this seems unlikely to occur. We began to talk to each other with the sense, even then, that what remains between us, is the answer to why we came together in the first place. It’s still too soon to judge that consistent reality. Not enough has happened. The time hasn’t been cleaned of its contraries. Still, it goes on.

The sky is like a fog descending from above. The sun shows enough power to corrupt the gray. The light moves into the eyes like concern, squeezing the sides to the center, pulling the lids in tight, to be able to see more, as one sees less. What occurs is not what remains, as dramatic as what occurs can be. One candidate for office is new; he has the appeal of freshness. The other may appeal to what remains in our need for leaders. Something that begins has the quality of remaining. We can’t know if that’s true, until it becomes apparent it its being no different than the center of our eternity.

A Horse for the Journey

She said she hoped my heart was happy. I tried to say I had a happy heart. I said it’s hard to judge a happy heart. My heart is happy to carry the force of my experience and the force of my being, back and forth, between their houses. The mind of thoughts and feelings registers happiness, and my heart is a horse for the journey. Seeing a sonogram of my heart triggered in me the awe of the heart’s constancy. Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming,” written just after WWI, is being applied to the current war. It’s being misread and misinterpreted as the warnings of a man different from the one who wrote it. Nothing that is, knows its future. Isness has no past or future.

She has a wounded heart. I might be acting out her fears, or acting out my fears for her. My friend asked me if I’d reached a place where what happens to my words no longer mattered to me, where the words in themselves satisfied my writing them. I said there’s no more need that they be heard, or even that they be born, only that they be honored in their coming.

A man picks up an instrument that's meant to convey messages to others. He falls in love with the life of the instrument. In its heart, it plays the music of its private life. He can't remember the purpose of his playing, but he plays on. Joy doesn't hear the joyful and can't know its effect. What soft beast sighs, for its time to come round at last? The head of the rebels tells his compatriots how hard it is to start a revolution, how much harder it is to maintain it, but the hardest part, he says, is what has to happen after the revolution is won.

Jackson Pollock Was a Painter

Jackson Pollock was a painter pretending to be a painter, drinking, fucking, fighting, painting, talking. He tried to act like a regular guy with his family. Then one day, he became a painter. He couldn't go back to playing one. He'd become one. Some might say it's what killed him, to become the one he'd been imitating in himself. He was odd in his family. It's what they expected. He began to act like an artist and dress the part, still odd to himself and everyone around him. "I would like to lie in the pool of your body," I think, looking at a certain woman. We play roles akin to the reality we scarcely recognize, until we begin to play who we are, unknown by others.

An artist buys an artist's brush at the artist's market. Then, one day, he becomes an artist, and everything before is swept away in the first stroke of his transformation. My desire to be with a woman is a role I have played, until it became how I was seen, nearly who I am. I played the role of a lover, living in the heart of love. Then, one day, I became what I approximated, in the center of what now becomes periphery. My objects have lost their objectivity, including how I live in my art.

Nothing Happens in Love

Nothing happens in love. A room is lifted from its contraries, to be set back down in the same place, transcendent, with the furniture missing. I see you, without seeing you the way I saw you. I see you; the way the light sees what it falls upon. The trance of love plays a surrogate for love. It becomes a way of being. But being doesn't need any way to be. Someone says we are love itself, and that becomes a paradigm of the love we define away from itself. The pursuit of love is a fraud for love itself. We humans woke at the dawn of reality, and we noticed something, so we gave it a name. And we began to pursue what was already true. One morning I loved, and I was loved, and

nothing occurred, except there was nothing between us to name it love.

Valentine's Day

Another of the things we cherish as essential to our happiness has been dropped from the book of my spirit. It's as if we're bitten by a poison that affects how we are, and after a while, we think it's indispensable. A fondness for a kind of bondage becomes an adored aspect of our character. I've lost that sense of loss I once carried, by being alone in this life. Aloneness has no more emotional dark side of the moon. The freedom from any intoxication has two parts.

The first is the transformation of the attachment into an occasion of surrender. The second is the transcendence of habitual actions to another kind of dance. Poisons work quickly and antidotes may take years. Habits build insidiously and don't seem to want to release their grip. They become the gradual companion of breathing, and their replacement is just as gradual.

I can't pick anything up with the same fingers I once had. These hands don't hold things the way they once did. I can't get my arms around things like I once did, and my muscles don't feel the pain of atrophy. I've become muscled for a different kind of lifting. To love oneself is as complicated as any other love is. To love oneself is to stop thinking of oneself, the same as one would with any other love. To love oneself is to think more of one's self than one does of oneself. I would die for my self and forget myself in the sacrifice. I set my self free, with open arms. I would fight for my self with the strength of a lion. I'm always a home for my self, no matter where I go. No one can come between my love and my self, no matter what happens to me.

To Rise on the Air Like a Song

Someone asked Martha Graham why her dancers were on the floor so much. She said, "So they may rise again." Rising is rare. There's more company on the floor. There's camaraderie among those who accept the floor as their resting place. Those who rise are fewer. Imagine a community of painters who paint for the love of painting, musicians who play for the love of playing, performers who perform for the love of performing, and poets who write for the love of poetry. It's what separates the floor-bound from the risen. To be among the risen is to let go of the floor.

The Sweet Absence of Another's Nearness

I might wish there was a god or a lover in my immediate heaven, but I don't surrender who I am for the absence of someone to love. All day long, all night, every day, every night, I don't surrender who I am for the sweet absence of another's nearness. No lover, no god, I won't give up what I have for what I don't. There's nothing missing in what seems missing. No god, no lover comes to me in the night. No god, no lover, reassures me or promises me better than this. I'm left with everything I might imagine from them, to discover their presence, here, in this simplicity. I might wish there was a god in my immediate heaven, when what I imagine missing is only missing in my wishing for it. What's between my reality and the reality of everything real, is nowhere to be seen and as present as the air I breathe.

The Art of the Sun

Trees are not limbs that go out from the center but go toward the light. They seek the sun. Each limb seeks its place in the life of the tree. The sunlight seems to break apart, as it strikes in broken and scattered pieces of illumination. Things seem to seek and find the sun in pieces that seem broken and scattered from each other. We could speak of the sun everyday for years to come, and its name would never become worn, or lose its honor. Even darkness cannot diminish its shine. The sun helps destroy that which it helps create, but that's not its design. It is the sun, with no thought to the glory of what it does. These thoughts speak to that part of the mind that wants to give thanks to a deserving object.

The One Who Can Suddenly Sing

I don't feel the weight of life but sit in the weight of who I am. The weight of life weighed me down, as I waited for who I am to drop into its weight. There's no more waiting and no more weight. When we speak of the emptiness inside, or the hole in the heart, or being a lost soul, this weight of oneself is its fulfillment and its freedom. "So beautiful and can't sing, you go out the back door and sit in the back yard. So beautiful and can't sing. Between the sun and the rose bush, your voice is stolen. So beautiful and can't sing. You discover your voice, at the end of the garden, alone." As long as I thought something was missing, I was never truly alone. Alone, this aloneness knows no loneliness. No other is present to be absent from this open empty being, in a body that feels its true weight.

The Rounded Life of the Artist

Before the painting is painted, look at the presence of the painting. Or put paint in place and look for the essence of the painting in the paint. Or duplicate the source of the painting in the presence of an object to be painted. Or go nuts with paint stolen from the dollar store. I lie in bed and pray “Thy will be done” without “thy” and “will” and “done” and with “be” silent. It’s difficult to think the mind back before it took shape in language.

When I spoke recently to my recent love, I relit the fire of my mind that wants to reinstate its rule. I’m better off dwelling in the mystery. On the very lip of the moment I begin to un-think my habitual self, I feel free of its grip. I’m free to love, as soon as I stop trying to learn how, when, and where to love. As diligently as I’ve applied myself, over a lifetime, to learn the spit and grit of love, I’m at a loss to succeed. I discover I knew the essence but not the meaning of love, all along.

The way to paint a painting is to paint the painting as if one’s way of painting is intuitively known and cannot be remembered. The finest awareness is beyond my ability to grasp what’s already present in its unpredictable splendor. “I don’t know how to do this,” is the greatest start, and “I don’t know how I did that” is the greatest finish. These expressions define the rounded life of the artist.

Born Lucky Under a Full Sun

Occasionally, two people become a third person. A man loudly conducts business nearby. It pulls me out of myself to become less than what I am alone. It’s an ordinary degradation. I imagine a love that pulls me to a greater self, discovered in common with another. The sun has become common again, pulling me out of myself to a greater self, in common with the light. I’m heated to a warmer self. How could it not be that simple? There’s no other light that has the same effect. There’s nothing to be done about such luck. We’re all born lucky under the sun.

I exaggerate, in order to say how beautiful my eyes become in her presence. I go out of myself in what I love. I go into a third, neither myself nor not myself. I become more than I am as one, when one is the name and number of who we are. Outside myself, I become numberless. My self grows to being unnumbered in its expansion. As a number, one tries to bring

everything back to itself, but being only one is the squelching of reality. One is the possessor of oneness. It parcels the air into property. It owns the images that it captures in its lens. It seeks to own the camera. It believes it owns the light. One becomes oneness, outside itself in the third, with everything that is. This is my lover, my other, the object of my desire. Too beautiful for this small world, she makes the world larger than it is alone.

Home From the Sea

As retired Vikings, my friend and I have left conquering and pillaging behind. We sit in quiet conversation, when young Vikings come in the bar, roaring with delight in their mutual status. We sit in the back with a flagon near and watch the rituals. They punch and mock each other, casting aspersions on their manhood, laughing at the empty insults, until we are revealed as the Vikings we are. The bravado of the younger warriors is challenged. They don't know how to act in our presence. They try to continue their heroic play of lust and disdain. What suited them so well, being tested by their peers at play, is oddly threatened by our presence, but we don't threaten them, and we don't leave.

We sit in ourselves as elders, confirmed by time and experience. Our warring days don't need to be expressed, but there remains a hint of the rapacious killers we've happened to outlive. We have history not apparent in our demeanor, but something in our silence quiets the young. That quieting quality isn't shown in what we were once capable of being. It is, in their eyes, the image of what they are in their hearts. We are the present past and the present future of their suddenly quiet but lasting being.

The Peach Pink Skin of a Poet

The words hung in the air like another language at a distance. My mind struggled to make sense, where the air itself was dominant. I kept hearing a conversation between parts of the air. I could make out a few words. I could see a few images. I could feel the weight of meaning. The poet reading told stories of other people, without interjecting herself. She told detective stories with no killer and no victim. She put a tuning fork against the silence and marked the presence of its intruders. I heard the spider web of her heart beating in its durable, delicate construction.

At the party afterwards, I said I thought I knew her. She said I looked familiar. I asked if she was part of the life I once led, but she wasn't. She said she wished she'd been part of that thick riot of inspiration of another time and place. Then the worst poet in the room placed an empty wine glass on the table, on its side, with a fake plastic spill. In the kitchen, I looked into the peach pink skin of another, younger, but better-than-most poet. She was acting boldly shy in that forward way of a poet on the sauce. Another poet's beautiful daughter stood still and quiet. She'd become too old to be as young as she was. She was about to break out of herself, so she took her mother home early.

During the reading, the poet stood at a lectern that shielded her, except for one foot thrust out, like a shout in service to the science of observation. It takes genius to pay attention to detail without betraying the grandiose, putting one thing alongside other things of no more moment, like pieces of paint to make a painting. In her listing of things left after a great painter died, she painted a portrait he'd have recognized but never imagined. Her poem hung in the air where his webby, resilient paintings might have hung, a wordless poem painted in images of unwritten art.

A Long Flatbed Truck

A long, flatbed truck in a wet mud lot, a section of sheet metal, twisted and curled, like a strip of roof, blown off, to be discarded. The town is visited by actors, coaches and directors, creative people in a profession made of the beauty of their presence. It's their protection and freedom to make of themselves a profession. After we learn to walk, we learn a way to walk. We learn a way of walking that brings a certain attention. Still, we walk from here to there as a means of transportation. One lovely girl, unsure of the face she was born to wear, distorts it in the way she sucks a straw, jerks her womanly body like a rag doll, coolly watches those around her, with no happy child present in her manner.

The low clouds bank the hills. The hills front the clouds. A young man with the face of a line drawing calls out the time. Everyone laughs and leaves. There's too much definition in anyone's sight before the self has seen its face, grown beyond its growing. The brilliant light reveals the structure of the dark, but the inherent has the patience of the absence of time.

A Passing Paradise in an Endless Sea

My habits have their way with themselves. Personality is the calcification of character. Characteristics build on themselves like coral islands of once-living cells to make a passing paradise in an endless sea. Knowing what goes to make this thing of a life doesn't lessen my love of it. Imagine a god who fashions a universe of painfully sharp objects and luscious beauty. Imagine knowing it's all come from nothing and will return there one dayless day. Imagine knowing the source of knowing is better known when it's unknown.

A boy, one of the children of another player, as small as a lemur on a leafy branch, comes to the field and sits on the fifty-yard line in the grass and sinks into its green embrace. The wind comes up so powerful, it changes the temperature by twenty degrees, and the boy curls into his own legs. Another man shouts to his son, a small copy of himself, "It's time to go home," and the boy comes running. We divine ourselves in reproduction. Nothing more is needed to accomplish the wondrous. Those who live without children brave the singularity of their experience, all of us living out our common, ordinary divinity.

Over There Somewhere Else Apart

There's no aloneness in this being alone. It shapes itself sharply, especially when there's less to pull it away from sensibility. I know better what I know when knowledge doesn't crowd me like a family of relative realities. I can only know what becomes what I am. I see how great my knowledge becomes, alone, when I stop looking at what I know and see how well it's known.

The Sweet Healthful Cool

The trucks go by on the freeway like buildings on their sides. Ships set sail like buildings at sea. The sea is higher than all the graves it waters, the sweet, healthful cool, the house of purple and blue. Anyone who falls asleep at night wonders where the world goes, until it returns again in the morning like magic as ordinary as breathing. "How can this grand complexity, as hard as the wood and nails of a ship, disappear?" we wonder until we start to die, and the mystery begins to entice us more than before. In the thickness of my texture, I am given the vision of my history's absence.

The old aren't afraid of dying, as much as they're aware of its presence. Two guys speak Russian in a small café. They calmly consider each other's words, like farmers looking into the seed.

Bodies in Motion

My friend doesn't need to move for his body to be in motion. He lies in wait for its secrets to be revealed. Night has a different atmosphere than day has. The mind of the body is ancient in its memory, with nothing missing from its roles. A man with a prominent nose has taken the chair I usually take. Vaguely European, he leaves before I can gauge his character beyond an impression. Three heavy men sit together, wearing bulky coats like covers pulled across loads on trucks.

My friend is the seeker and also the core of his discovery of what occurs in a human body. He discovers not just what is occurring today, but that which, after millions of years, occurs in this moment. He lies at peace, until his attention becomes the actor of his motion. He sees his body become parts of its endless reach. Ambition acts for what acts of its own volition. He thought he was trying to learn something. He didn't know what it was, until it was his presence in his own body.

Rippled Images

She may be the same as I am, but she's not yet the same as she is. We share character like blood, we see like a third eye in common. We combine to no union but recognition. Desire can't make us lovers, even where nothing seems to be in its way. Nothing is wrong in this communion of spirit. There's nothing between us to come between us, but she's not yet who she is. Her inherency sees my inherency seeing her, but time has not brought her to the same place in her own experience. The only gulf between us is the gulf between herself and who she's bound to become. With no hand in the pool, I see the water un-blurred by rippled images. Most of those I know, I know in our mutual entanglement, yet I'm challenged to bring clarity to every entanglement. This original identification remains, even though the thicket beckons.

The Seasons of Beauty and Truth

The sun burns away the winter. Then the passes are closed by snow, and a

cold wind cuts the idea of summer to shreds. Still, it's inevitable. You'd think we'd know that, and maybe our bitterness depends on it. If it were truly endless, this season would not continue, it would simply be what's always true. Someone told my friend he was dishonest, because what he said last month is no longer true. He said it was true when he said it, so where is the dishonesty? How can some part of truth be relative to the truth, unless all of truth is false?

Beauty is relative to beauty, and beauty is both true and false. I look at her and I say, "If you were more beautiful, you might not be welcome in this world." And then she has a bad day or grows old, her beauty fades, and she's welcome everywhere, without contradiction, the way one would assume beauty is always welcome. Beauty itself is uncontained but it's contaminated by being made particular. I say to her, "You are beauty, not beautiful. You are true, not truthful." I speak to the heart of who she is, no matter what month it might be.

Ceremonial Substitutes

In a corner store, south of the border, brightly lit, with dark streets and a sky full of stars, the music was so loud it was inside my head, like the light from an old Italian movie. In the movie, in a tiny village, the harsh, direct light shines intensely like spotlights, as if the light is the narrator. In the black and white film, the background is starkly white and pitch black. Shadows act like stealthy characters. Music takes the reality to a state like drunkenness without the warmth of feeling in the blood.

Then, out of the starkness, a slow-witted man who cherishes a statue of the Virgin that's half his size, carries it into the sand by the shore and props it up next to him. The statue of the Virgin is his companion. He pulls his hat off his head and holds it in his hands. He puts his hand to his face. His life and all its gestures are exquisitely themselves. They are his attention, when nothing else is there to take his attention from himself. His hands exude the attention of his surrender the way the Virgin exudes her forgiving love.

Bones

The Legerdmain of the Self

To sit on the inside of the personal, looking at the personal, is similar to looking at the personal from the outside. We call freedom from the self a kind of self-forgetting. We call it unselfishness, altruism, giving, loving, caring, devotion to others, the final freedom of the soul. We hope to follow the flight of the arrow to its new home in the land of our finest intentions. We desire to separate ourselves from ourselves, by following ourselves into the world, in order to break our attachments by becoming one with the needs of others. This is to fool oneself with one's own slight of hand.

One may fall back within oneself to a cleaner landing. We begin to see the personal self more kindly, by forgiving the mistake of the self. We might love our personal self from the being of our existence forward. We might begin to delight in the personal as the form of one's original impersonal existence. To walk in the crowded street, losing oneself for the concerns of others, is more impossible than becoming an enlightened being.

Looking for relief from self, in devout attention to the lives of others, may be a lovely way to live, or a kind of discipleship, but it remains a distraction from any true relief from the self. One's enlightenment is at hand, deep in the self. Its heritage is the inextinguishable love of the energy, the spirit, the being in life itself that one has in common with everyone else. We discover our freedom from self-centered thought by going deep into the self, until there is no self-centered thought to be found. And then the attention to others is not to the care of their likewise imprisoned egos but to their freedom.

The Purpose of its Origin

When I had no reliable serenity, I thought it was a word, an idea, and a challenge. I thought it was a purpose to be attained, as if one might learn it, to match it. It seemed as if one might go from having no serenity to becoming serene. My efforts failed to achieve their goal. Then, I found serenity where it had always been, beneath the fight for its place in my life.

When men were only a few and newly intelligent, one of them was serene. He wondered what to call it. It was simply true. There was no truth to be

sought. Serenity was upon him. He recognized it in others. He pointed his finger at everyone and said what they were being. My friend wrote, facetiously, from Italy that, over there, they had a different word for everything. Everything is what it is, and its name is not the truth of it.

The Cancer of the Good

A well-known and respected author was asked by an interviewer to say one last thing, in the remaining thirty seconds of the interview, to tell what advice he might have for young writers. He answered quietly, and too soon for the host's need to fill the remaining time. "Tell the truth," he said. I heard it, as if no one had ever ventured the idea in my presence. I heard it, as if it were for me to hear. It became my mantra and remains so. The telling part was that I'd never considered it, and I was already practiced in the pursuit of my craft. The host of the show was at a loss to fill the remaining time.

Before that advice was spoken, I looked out of my eyes at the world and unconsciously calculated how best I could move in its complexities. I had my share of incidents of honesty that touched my heart, but I hadn't taken it to heart in its authority. Now I see how it resonated. These prismatic moments splay in all directions from their occurrence. What came before is made clear by what comes after. I had no sense, at the time, how such a simple piece of advice could make its way into every corner and layer of one's being.

The cancer of the good metastasizes in receptive cells. I told, or was told, the truth at such moments, as fate declares what we find significant. It isn't merely hearing what's true in the world; it's hearing what's true about who we are. The truth is only a path to what is. I have a friend who scoffs at truth. For him, truth is a cover word for ways he's been beaten down. He turns on those who use truth as a sword of abuse and rejection. He keeps himself as a secret from scrutiny. He takes pride in his separation.

Telling the truth is a kind of art, to look at a thing and tell it as it is. To shed the skins of its portrayal, until it achieves the nakedness of its original self, not to strip it of its beauty, but to strip it of what protects us from its beauty. To see a naked thing is to see the nakedness of its beauty is to stand naked in the prism of the moment of seeing.

The Fine Point of the Soul

I swore I would never do anything to blunt the fine point of my soul, in what Keats called the effect of modern society, but a teacher said there were no wise men in the caves in the mountains, that the only place to live free is here, in the marketplace, everywhere. Keats admired the energy of a fight in the street, below his window, in the crowded, noisy city, but he moved to the country. He moved to the center of his being a poet. He moved to the center of his being, a poet. He gave up the life of his ambition and took up, even more fully, the life of his wonder.

The closer I draw to the center, the stronger I am in the reach of the center. The farther I go from the center, the weaker I am in its broken reach. I run out to my fingertips, and all I feel is their whorl. I run deep within myself, at a fearful distance from my hands, and I gain their touch. To be human is to be an instrument. To be true to oneself is to be a musician. To be true to being itself is to be the wind. The fine point of one's soul is where the music has yet to become a shape in its sound, in the ground beneath the emergency of its emergence.

Diving in Bedrock

My teacher asked me to go deeper. I wanted to say that everything is what it is, that there is no deeper, but I said nothing. He asked me what the secret was, and I said there was no secret. In the awareness of one's existence, like one discovers in smoking marijuana, that there is no way to get any higher by inhaling more smoke. The high is only in the quality of the weed, not its quantity. But I heard what he said, and, in time, I came to see that there is a deeper reality, at least in letting go of the hold of the superficial.

A man sits at his table like a seething beast, looking for the prey he cannot see. Hunched over his drink, his muscled legs crossed, he changes position. Restless, he's ready to leap, ready to run. Nothing enters his spirit to take him out of his readiness. But it's not the readiness of his reality that agitates him. Instead, he dreams in tired thought. To stay in the real, without leaving it, to go deeper into what is. It seems simple enough, and that's a clue to its possibility. Deeper is not harder. A rock sinks deeper in the lake without any effort of its own.

I dive in and out of this water, like a fish that's also a bird. To go deeper, one must come apart in the air and dissolve in the water. One must become what's common between them. In this morality of dying, we take our place among the elements. Nothing dies, but it becomes more of what it is. What sinks deeper into the bedrock is the realization of the reality of its nature.

At Such a Depth

A psychic tells others what they reveal about themselves before they know it. Whole civilizations reveal themselves without knowing their nature. What a shock to be told what's true, before it feels true in the mind. Artists paint the portrait of those who believe they still are what they haven't been for years. "That's not me, I don't look like that!" Deep in the stillness of a self-portrait is a truer self one only sees by letting go of one's romantic eyes.

To be absolutely present in the moment of portraiture, to psychically divine the moment of here and now, is to be the immediate future of who one is, a truth that is so far ahead of one's self image, one may only glimpse it. Seeking doesn't teach arriving. Arriving doesn't teach being. Being doesn't teach what has no name. Psychics look at the surface and see what can be seen just beneath the surface. Beneath what is, lies what can be seen, at such a depth.

Dance Across Montana

for Nicki Giovanni at Virginia Tech

A couple dances in Montana. Her small arms go up his back, and her hands dance across Montana. Their feet shuffle in loose unison in the dance of easy lovers. She turns and walks across Montana, with a wide, soft smile on her face. He watches the air she leaves behind, with Montana in his happy eyes, and neither leaves the state of their union.

With burnt yellow clouds above the ridge, the east turns to shadow, deep furrows darken, the hillside takes the shape of bodies reclining. The bodies of the earth, as close as kin, are in the things that bring us to love, nameless, before we name them. The clean air treats everything with respect. The lines are lean, the colors light and strong, distance doesn't run away from anything.

I used to live in that house on that hillside, the one where I used to live and never go, since then, when I moved away, to stay. Dozens die in a senseless show of rage, and in the aftermath, a famous poet says, we don't know what to do, we can't explain it, we will survive, we will thrive, we're alive. Her voice rises above the grieving. Not to be taken down by the blows that took so many lives, the poet speaks for those who don't know what to say. We're one, we're one together, we're undone, and we begin again, together. A shout follows, like joy follows a broken heart, to fill it, with its beginning.

The Easy Escape from Nirvana

We escape the reality of our existence, clinging to any passing thought or action. Any version of our condition is more welcome than this nirvana, this grace, this ordinary heaven. This reality has no teeth for our neck. As soon as I speak about this unspoken reality, I show a film of the tropics, I open an album of photos. Look how beautiful, how serene, how peaceful, how rich, how stirring. Yet, as soon as I live what I am, I forget its name.

We say we love each other and avoid the true nature of love. I fashion a model of love from what I avoid. I go looking for its match in those I might love, the same as I do with this moment of being. It seems easier to worship replicas. Instead of this danger, I'm concerned with what has its teeth in my neck. It's been a part of me for so long, I can't remember when it wasn't true.

Carl Jung told his patient, Roland, "You're a dipsomaniac, a drunk, you need a transformative awakening, and I can't help you. There's no way to achieve what you need. Goodbye". There's no way to be free, this teaching has no history, no master and no secret, concealed or revealed. On the boat sailing back to the States, Roland found his impossible awakening. He became awake within himself, with no help from anyone, in the truth of his hopeless condition. He was simply being human in the awakened regions beyond his being human.

The Buddha Spilled My Coffee

Whenever there's a tragedy, I can feel my heart buckling under the pressure, not of any one occasion of pain or loss, but of the sheer bulk of these occasions. One event calls out the others. We've seen so many, all of us on this planet. It's time for us to take a deep breath, like someone called the Buddha once did, under a tree, once upon a time. This is my tree, this time

and place, this absence of time and place, this cool, sunny day. Buddha spent years trying to figure out how to find peace in a world of pain and suffering. Then one day, something happened. And nobody knows what. He was free, not only of pain and suffering, but of his search for their ending.

Since time immemorial, I've been capturing geese and stuffing them in bottles, so I might wisely free them from their imprisonment. I no longer care about that. I've abandoned the farm I started for the geese that I rescued from the abuse I heaped upon them. From now on, I'll have nothing to do about that and everything else. This will tax my resources, to have so much nothing to do about so many things.

Buddha snapped. He'd thought about pain and suffering for so many years, he simply couldn't do it anymore. He found a better way. Now the Buddha smiles, with a fat belly as the signifier of contentment. He stepped outside the wars of the mind, and found himself at peace. He came to know the peace he felt. "Let us be at peace," the Buddha said, "here, under this tree, under the sun."

Rumi in the Amazon

A small tribe in the Amazon has no language for anything abstract. They live their entire lives in the physical present. They have never adapted to the ways of anyone else's thinking. Some analysts think the tribe might be the only truly stupid people ever discovered. Christian missionaries cannot interest them in the life of a dead man that no one's ever met. They don't plant crops or store up provisions for the future. Everything they do is seen and described in the present. Anyone, who leaves their sight, simply walks out of their experience.

One day, a boy carves a replica of a newly arrived seaplane. He's excited, and the model is well made, but in a few days, it's been discarded, and no more models are made. It has no more significance. What kind of artist can this be? What kind of people are these? All the worship and wonder that we codify in detail is near to hand to them and as present as the real.

We're amazed with our abstractions. They are the glory of our civilization. In reading Dr. Seuss, we neglect our children. In reading Shakespeare, we neglect each other. In reading the past and future, we neglect our origin in the present. I'm another practitioner of this neglect. Rumi used to decry the

foolishness of his words, as if he might be saying, “Don’t read my poems. Be in the moment of life itself.” But Rumi continued to write poems. After every warning he made about the distraction of his poetry from the very thing they addressed, he kept writing. Even stupid people, like we are, can lay aside the poem, and dance. We can dance inside the poem, even as we write it, even as we read it, even as we remember it, even as we forget it ever existed.

A Drunkard’s Tale

In the struggle between reality and personality, one imagines the difference like the difference between sobriety and addiction. One imagines that the addicted self is interesting, colorful, adventurous, fraught with angst, full of drama, pain and pleasure. One imagines the real self to be a dry peace of stilted happiness, living in a harpist heaven with bad music.

We mistake the body it animates for the animating self. Caught up in my character, I mistake it for my enjoyment. Who I am is shown by the dust tossed in my light. I celebrate what stories I have to tell of this particulate life. I think I’m made happy by where I am and what I am. I fall in love by a stream and the love of water becomes sacred. I come to life in a mind in a body and my love of this place and name becomes sacred, but my reality is not the man drunk on his thoughts. The drunk thinks he’s the lucky one. His stories tell the shape of his existence, but he never finds joy in his persona. All joy is in joy itself and not in its dusty air. Life is told as a drunkard’s tale, by those in love with their drunken past. It’s a tale of tales, kept alive for old time’s sake, without allowing the true biography of what’s real, to begin.

A Statue Come to Flesh

I dreamt I was walking in warm air. It was an enveloping pleasure that’s held in abeyance by a long winter. I dreamt I lay with a soft and welcoming lover. I awoke in fear of the day. Fear is no less a dream than desire. I got dressed and finished what had been the focus of fear. It was a task that needed doing. I practice being present in these moments of recognition.

A man comes to tell me his adventures, living and working as a cherry farmer, hitchhiking to Mexico and traveling the country. It is the life he was born to. He knew its margins when he was a boy, but within what he loves, he’s unlimited. He drives back and forth across the mountains between the

city and his farm. It's tedium with no tedium, a kind of meditation. He drives within his love. I sit within my love, taking this journey back and forth across the mountains of thought and feeling. Inside what we love and the way we love is love itself. I write its awkward autobiography, to shake off the habits of its alter ego, this personal self I play at being. My friend is proof of my intention. There's a certain solipsism that enhances all other experience. This reality is no more knowable than any other. I'm only truly knowable is this unknowable being.

The Ascent of the Descent

Grace and gravity belong to everyone in the practice of our being with words. The first leap in learning is learning to speak from silence. Poetic language stirs skepticism; Poets make obscure what should be easy. Truth and beauty should not be difficult. A tin miner approached Neruda and said, "You must speak for us, who cannot speak for ourselves."

Neruda didn't know he was so needed to speak, in the common language, what's uncommon, in the telling of the untold, in the saying of the unsaid. A poet is called to go into the earth of our being and return with the beauty and the truth of it, in words that match the ascent of the descent, in some way that molds the tin to its purpose.

This Charade of Façade

I've tried, almost without being aware of it, to construct a persona for myself. I thought my failure to sustain a self I could rely on, and show consistently to the world, was a failure. Instead, I discover it's an indication of the awareness of a more reliable reality. To be other than one's persona may be the most common condition among us. Psychiatry helps to fashion a persona for the mentally ill, for those in war, for those in the workplace, in school, at home, in confusion, fear and doubt, but it's inconsistent with the truth of who we are. What I feared about myself showed me what's more true than this charade of façade.

Years ago, I turned to a friend, during a break from work and said, "I feel like I'm making it all up." By that I meant my visible reality, everything I presented to the world, everything I thought I was in the world, everything about the character that accrued to my name. As I said it, I felt instantly freer. Years later, I looked down at my body and saw there was nothing there.

There was no single being, contained by definition, sitting in my chair. It was a moment of clarity and peace. Everything we do goes against this absolute and ordinary truth of reality.

In the recognition of my own illusion, my persona has become more recognizable. There's an accumulation of life lived in a body that has shape and form. It speaks, and I hear it. It's become pleasantly familiar. But the reality of consistent being isn't contained or defined in this appearance, no matter how well I kick a soccer ball, or make love to a woman, or form a coherent sentence. It isn't that I ever needed guidance in learning how to live as a human being, I only want to get my priorities straight and stop trying to believe an illusion as the reality of my existence. There's nothing wrong with the illusion, but it isn't the place to see one's self at heart.

The Good of a Poet

On the radio, I heard a poet speaking at a rally at a university, where an amateur assassin had just killed thirty-two of his classmates, and I was moved by her words. Unlike most of the words about the event I'd heard, before and since, I heard the good of a poet in the midst of the most present and cruel life, not separate from it but apart from its entrapment. The poet's voice was raised in a declaration of survival in the face of tragedy. Her language engaged the mind, so a meeting of the spirit might occur. The good of her words was their synchronicity with the spirit. Any poet needs to go into a kind of awareness where a meeting in the language might match the moment. Awareness instructs the mind to accompany good where it might not be able to go on its own.

Three men conduct business, their minds in support of their work. They share the common language of commerce. The spirit of their meeting lives at arms length from its home. They circle the house they live in, describing its selling points. It's a practical matter to be practical. Spring appears in imitation of its coming self. People begin to act the way people do when they're serious about being warm. A group gathers in a circle, hunched over, letting the sun prove itself among them. A gradual joy emerges from the expectations of a cold and pale April.

In the Range of What Happens

Until this moment in my mind, whatever might happen had been left to the vagaries of possibility. I might have work to do, but it was being directed by the mystery of how it might play out. Yesterday, I put plugs in my ears to block the conversation of salesmen, and today, I did the same for the talk between two young women. My patience has been exhausted, but not with others. I've grown impatient with my patience. I imagine driving cross-country.

The open road is the illusion of possibility turned into a series of experiences. The setting is in constant flux, but the range of what happens is narrow, except for what might happen, and that's the pull. Looking at the opposite sex has always had the same sense of possibility. Anything might happen with anyone, but the range of what happens is narrow. We're all driven by what drives us. That's another list of vagaries, full of possibility.

The range of what happens is narrowed by the fear I carry near the heart of my purpose. The fear of what might happen and the fear of what might not happen are the same fear, dependent on the patience of expectation. Patience and expectation are operating partners in the mind. Possibility and impossibility are similar partners. These sets of partners seek to run the corporation of what is, when what is has no need for partners such as these.

She Put Her Hand on His Head

My friend spent a day with an old love, to make new what had never been made old. The years left them unchanged in the heart. Their reunion was kinder, but no less a recognition. She put her hand on his head, and her touch erased thought from his mind. Most touch is caressing and holding, but some touch reaches the core. His friend was never not his friend. They were brief lovers, but it wasn't what made them friends, and being friends didn't make them lovers. They were always neither and both. An acquaintance, in her loving nature, put her hand on my back, without intent, and I felt the flowering of a certain heaven. It was a kind of bonding of what's missing with what takes away the missing.

A wise old man put his hands on my face, and my controversies were concluded across the decades. Some touch jumps the physical, and thoughts of it are useless. The taste of such a delicacy erases the thought of hunger. It

makes my body less a body and me more than a body. I put my own hands on my own face, like the touch of a beloved elder. My own hands remind me what's in my heart, like streams of gold in a mountain of crystal transparency.

The Shadow of Fear

The more I recline into formlessness, the more I see my intention. The center of my purpose thrives in this fathomless being. I am as finite as my energy in life itself is infinite. My fear is the shadow of the shape of infinite possibility. I live in fearless possibility, in the formless unknown. I live in the inarticulate intention of the infinite, in the shape of my slight and slender life. I open this vessel to see the intention of being in life itself. Intention itself, in my intention, is to realize who I am, with no increase or loss of self, in this endless empty identity.

The Wu Li Heart

The Wu Li Dancers dance ahead of their demons, so no demon can catch them. With no belief in science or spirituality, everything is a dance. When I begin to speak, I am no poet of words. As soon as I stop speaking, I am no poet of words. Poet is a name I use that disappears in the using, yet of poetry I am its champion. Indifferent to it, I say there is no greater spiritual dance than this creativity. Poetry is the science of thought and feeling, with no theory of evolution or construction, except that the good should tear itself open in the telling, so the good is lost and found in its transit from nothing to something and back again. Death is predictable, and every birth is fraught with unknowns. The Wu Li heart holds nothing in its hands for its demons to covet.

A young man in swept-wing sunglasses, red jacket, tanned skin, two days of stubble, and windblown hair, sits at a sidewalk table, drinking from a cup with a lid. He turns his head, searching. Then, hunched over, he throws his head back, watching and waiting. On the inside, sits a man with gray hair, cut and combed, white skin, with a paunch like pregnancy, reading the paper, turning pages with the practice of a lifetime, scanning for something of interest, never looking up. Men dance with their demons to ward off their demons. Wu Li is Chinese for “patterns of organic energy, nonsense, my way, I clutch my ideas, and enlightenment.” This is the way I dance free from my demons, no longer clutching the light of the ideas of my way.

Jesus Laughed

My dancing heart won't take direction. It won't stop dancing. It doesn't listen to advice. All it wants to do is dance. A playful heart, in prison, is a playful heart. My father could play, but he didn't know how. There's no room for true play in a tragic world with comedians for relief. I commit to play, to plunge deep in the heart. True play has no paid expositor in this world of travail and respite. Struck in the side with a sword, Jesus laughed. He knew there was no body to be wounded, but he sealed an obligation to take it seriously.

Jesus had to appear to be born again, in the body of our all too human flesh, so he cried out and continued to die. There's no need to be born again, no one needs to do the impossible a second time. Being born is the sleight of hand of existence, and this open, empty hand is the revelation of my truth.

Persona Manqué

Playing characters on stage, I discovered that as long as I stayed in character I could do no wrong. When the character spoke, I was free. There were no mistakes in character. Living in the world as myself, I look to recognize the same freedom. Being true to myself comes when I drop my character, in favor of the energy of spirit that plays me. I devote myself to the character of my experience, or I fall back into being what it is that plays me.

When I lose myself in character, I let my character do the being. This absence from myself seems fulfilling. Lost in what I become, my character is a persona manqué. My character speaks in the form of my being. My drama is the story of my being, in character. This is the common drama. I am what I become, I am what becomes who I am, and I am this becoming from being to a man in his character. This is the only story I'm able to tell, without pretense. True to my inherent self, I cannot then be false in the shape of who I become. I have the choice of devotion to character or to this being I am. One is free of artifice, the other is freedom itself.

Deep Blue Spills in a Light Blue Sky

The sky was deep blue spills in light blue water, like a painted ceiling, a roof of blue, abstracts of color. It rose to such a height to make everything below it a place of awe. I moved in my car, like a man beneath a great friendly

heaven. We gather in this room of earth to recognize the marvel of our being in awe. We gather in this room of wide earth beneath a broad canopy of wonder. There's humility that betters my own. There's greatness that grows my greatness larger. The sutras of the spirit sing the nirvana of my heaven. Beyond every god is a reality that outshines it.

Like children in a room, unable to describe what's outside the room, we listen to anyone with a story of what might be beyond. A man sits by a rock wall in a canyon in the desert, safe enough to sleep another night, wise enough to survive another day. He neither prays nor panics. He's alone, but he knows an even greater aloneness. He lives in the wonder of his heart, with his being at home in its unwalled self, losing its parts.

Along the River and Over the Hills

I drove south on Canyon Road, along the river, on a two-lane highway with no traffic, then back over the ridge, through stunning vistas, between two small towns in the west. In moments of anonymity, nature rises to grandeur, and the works of man reduce to a stretch of highway with roadside turnouts for the fishermen. Living apart from the society of others, in the earth's indifference like an infinite blessing, I'm not made small by size made significant, I'm made without boundaries, on the open road, under the wide sky.

To want to learn who I am, the work is never done. To learn myself is to chase a chimera, from the abyss of unknowable reality to a mountain range of definition, with cliffs that fall away to the riverbank. The self I try to know becomes clear, as I turn away from the desire to know, to know what remains to be known, just a few miles outside Ellensburg. Whoever I am, among others, is who I am in myself. The variety of self in any one being is clear in the absence of any self at the core, inside a silver pickup truck on a blacktop road. I turn to the source and become as I am. I turn back to the world and see who I'm being, not from within its uncertain form, but from within its deep uncertainty, on the scenic road, rolling south toward Yakima.

The Seas Keep Themselves Separate

The great love of last year is nowhere to be found in this fragile arrangement of lives. We try to build institutions of solidity. We make laws of our desires to keep the parts of the sea from pouring in and out of each other. We're

made nameless and homeless by this life's long love of its surrogate self. I become the weather of my senses. The weather becomes the weather of my body. Yesterday's weather has no place today, but when something occurs like a joy, one wants it to stay in its place.

The love I feel is not what it claims to be, falling from the sky like a showy violence. Love makes a hole in the earth, until the fire goes out, and only the hole remains. We name the jagged fissure of love's occurrence. We invite others to see what no longer is, in the empty shape of what once appeared to be a catastrophe of divine appearance. I walk away from the celebration of what doesn't exist in any form, despite the revered ruins of its residue. Something did occur, a thing of nothing that I cherish in my accepting what it truly is.

She has a Softly Ruined Face

She has a softly ruined face, with age lines in baby skin, her hair bleached white by time, sparkling eyes in protective creases. She has earned her scrimshaw beauty. Her being alive earns a measure of peace. A wise man listens to the litany of practices engaged in by his disciples, who seem eager to take on more of the same. Hearing the end of their list of devotion, he says, "That's enough. You've done enough. The purpose of meditation is to stop meditating. To be in awareness is to reach the moment where practices are no longer useful."

They stare in disbelief. He's calling an end to their chosen path. It's not easy to stop at the end of a devoted life, to then begin to experience the object of our devotion. I am the master of my devotion. In the search for liberation, I exhaust my own search. Age takes away what distracts us from the beauty of who we are. Youth is an onslaught of distraction, until one sees freedom in this moment. Striving fails to teach arrival. Doing fails to teach being.

Pictures of Home

The Queen sits on her throne, representing the family that's ruled for four hundred years. She's the paragon of stability. Her visage is a calming reassurance. My mother didn't change her demeanor in ninety years. We expected her to be what she expected herself to be. It drove her children to the far corners of the land. Detachment is an imitation of what occurs naturally. We take up a natural likeness for our private peace. Away from

home, we hang pictures of home. We fall in love with ourselves as thinking creatures, when our original awareness was thought from nothing.

Because I couldn't leave it behind, I could never go home. To let go of seeking home lets me be home. Leaving home makes me absent from myself, masks of peace are hung in empty halls of separation. "Come Home!" cries out from the center to the parts that have left it, until no one is left to answer. I cry for joy when anything calls itself home, in grief, in pain, in love, in simple recognition. The farthest distance home is no distance at all. I seldom went to see my mother, and I couldn't be rid of her. When I finally went to see her, she had disappeared in my heart.

The Privilege of Passion

Whenever I felt passion, I thought something should happen, as if passion had a privilege. When I fell in love, something had to be done. My passion for love separated itself from love itself, becoming the privilege of passion, taking possession of the habit of love. What's held inherent is overridden. I indulge the children of my passion with candies, until they're fat with privilege. In this privileged mind, I own what I think, what I feel, what I am.

This mind wants to own what these things name as their incarnations, as if desire has the right of love on its side. Desire grows a garden in the name of love, then claims the privilege of its gardening. Desires, lifted from love itself as the property of the lover, in this habit of passionate privilege, become the stolen ownership of unanswered love. Desire becomes the likewise owner of answered love, profiting love to the purse of one who has been given it.

A Baby in a Baseball Cap

A couple dances to the radio, a boy has a bowl-cut Mohawk like a drain-plug for his skull. This large chair has the tight fur of a beast. I sit on stage as the curtain rises. Aware of the audience, I include the audience and the space of the theatre in the spoken reality. I extend my hand and turn it slowly. All eyes are on the turning of a hand in the light. The light widens its attention to a woman wearing white and black, a man in green, another man in black and beige, and a baby in a baseball cap. Weariness from travel has worn them down, and they awaken to the moment, apart from their journey on a stage empty of anyone, in the presence of being, in the life of the sun.

The Posture of Peace

The decision to be at peace can only come out of peace. Anything else is a posture of peace, like a posture of honesty or a posture of truth. We've gotten used to posturing, in this small circle of souls we call our world, but nothing grants peace like peace itself. Anything that says it does is a kind of posturing. Even among the peaceful, there are posturing voices of pretense. We tell ourselves we're not peaceful creatures. We believe we're incapable of peace, but peace is our only direction, from beginning to end. Peace is the constant current beneath the turbulent surface of its proclaimers and deniers.

Because I'm aware of the peace of my being, I can say I'm at peace, despite the posturing of some characters of my own thought. Saying doesn't make it so, but saying does make what's so said. And being said, it hears itself called to every level of reality. Whatever is said that is real becomes real in the ways we articulate ourselves. The neglect of the real keeps it from taking its place in what we recognize as real. I'm at peace, and this peace is deeper and wider than any place in myself. I can rest in its reality. I don't need to lean forward in a posture of peace.

I'm at peace. Not the business of peace but this peace of being. I am at myself. I don't say this so I'll believe what I say. I don't say this so others will believe what I say. I say this so the peace that I am will be said. There are too many other voices claiming the space, the way noise claims stillness with more and more noise. In this body, I'm at peace. In being, I am peace itself.

A Raft of Civilization

A friend pulled me aside, when I was young, and warned me about my future wife. "She doesn't know who she is," he said. I thought, "That's fine. I don't know who I am, either." After that, I took it upon myself to find a character I could come to know. I was less worried about her than I was about myself. I tried to cobble together a character I could present to the world; one I could depend on in my own mind. The more I worked on it, the less I knew. The more depth and range I discovered in myself, the less I knew to trust. The more I learned of my history as a member of my sex, my family, and my human history, the less I knew to trust. The more I discovered about my imagination, my concerns, beliefs, likes and dislikes, the less I knew about myself as something substantial and unchangeable.

When my friend described the woman I would later marry, it revealed a truth I began to explore. The core of that truth is deep within a sense of not knowing. That not knowing is the only consistent reality. Born at ease in our not knowing, we're apprenticed to teachers in schools of knowledge and knowing. The imagination of our humanity has piled layers upon itself; layers of teaching that defy the only knowledge that doesn't come and go.

A group of Bedouins, a hundred years ago, were shown a picture of a man standing and asked to identify it. None could, until one man ventured that it might be a foot. They were unschooled in knowing how to read a picture. We've been schooled for millions of years to think we have shape and form to ourselves. We've made a cult of our images, an elaborate overlaying of thought upon a raft of civilizations.

The Impersonator

This man I play for real has become a lot more fun, since I realized I am not he. Don't get me wrong. I'm not some other guy passing myself off as this man. I'm not a lost identity in some netherworld of questionable character, who takes the role of various people to further his nefarious purposes. I'm not a charlatan perpetrating an elaborate fraud. I'm not someone at a loss to define myself in the common language of our lives. I have an autobiography that would rival any in its explicit and reasonable detail. I've been around the block. I have credentials. And, perhaps surprisingly, I don't have deep, unresolved psychological problems leading to uncertainty or rigidity.

I'm at peace with myself, and I get along with others. What's gotten me to this point of departure owes something to the accumulation of experience and the consistent realization that no matter what I do or how long I do it, I won't find my reality in these things of a life. I find my reality in letting it go. Becoming an alcoholic taught me a lesson about being human. It taught me that every problem we face is not found in the object of the problem but in our relationship to it. This is true in every phase of our lives. The problem isn't booze; it's the attachment to booze.

Any problem I might have, as a person, is not in being a person, but in my attachment to it. Being this guy has been more fun since I lost interest in the relationship I have with him. I can say I love him, and my love is unconditional. The obsession with self has lifted. My wellbeing is not

dependent on him. I've found myself between a self and no self, with no ties between them, except in there being difference.

A long truck with a load of hay, like a building on its side, goes sliding by, on its way to the storage lot, where its load will remain under an enormous blue tarp, or in a high ceiling shed, until it becomes feed for cattle with lips that work like fingers, pulling the hay apart. A man in a red van runs his car too fast against the curb and bounces back, slightly embarrassed by his misjudgment.

Another Man Taught by Another Man

I watched a wise man, living as a teacher, to see if he would betray himself as another man taught by another man to believe something from what other men had said to each other, a long time ago, or if he was in being with the original moment of awareness. It's a old, sad story, that what we teach each other could be held suspect, that what men tell other men, as the unimpeachable truth, straight from the godhead, could be held to question, by asking, how is this not like something written by a man for a man's purposes. How is this not a way to separate us from each other, from our simple reality, by claiming it as a path to our eternal reunion?

We are the real thing of this original reality, living as observed and observer in one. Separation defines desire, as desire defines separation. Fear has a greater ability to embrace than love does, but love doesn't come and go. Fear darts and dodges, seeking entry where it's finally granted none. The play of fear will do what it can to gain its throne. It has no regency, except by its enthronement. A wise man pointed past his teaching to my untaught origin, and doubt declared itself, as it left my mind, at peace in the origin of its trusted being.

The Scarlet Arrow

In the drama of life, things happen that require attention. Attention feeds on itself to become the monitor of life, until whatever one attends to becomes the nature of who one is. The woman next to me is reading a story of betrayal. There are so many ways we're focused away from who we are. The center sends out arrows, and we follow the arrows, expecting to find, among their targets, a sense of our existence and our place in it. A mother rocks her baby, his tiny feet in thick, soft socks, his head a ball of airy fuzz.

A Habit of My Hands

When I release what I think I love, it seems cruel and unfair. We think the war must be won, as if good intentions divine their ends, when what occurs outlives our desires. Determination has a military mind. Desire believes it will outlive its adversaries, equipped with dreams of trumpeted glory. Desire flies to the sun on wings of wax, believing the sun will succumb to its assault. Desire would transform the sun to its will.

I let the warring self of desire die, the same desire I came to cherish like a loved one. I no longer hold dear what's been dearly held. This letting go betrays my holding as a habit of my hands. I look at my empty hands, and I can't remember their constant cargo. Bare feet on bare ground cross the earth, holding nothing, as nothing holds them. Nothing interrupts their love of the earth. The earth doesn't need to be held to be the ground and beloved for it.

When the Greatest Actor Died

When the greatest actor died, many cried he was a being greater than himself. When something greater than a man inhabits a man, we want that greatness to live on. We see ourselves in reverse. We're not small beings, inhabited rarely by something greater. We're beings of great being, in the constraints of our limitations. We elevate a rare being to honor its rarity, to keep that rarity from becoming the common state of our character's commerce. No man is greater than any other, except he opens the gates of his life to its greater being. He puts himself inside a self larger than himself and watches it fit.

My friend says he will have no other gods before him. He says it so his ears can hear what his heart is speaking. He says it to lift the lid of god from the bowl of himself. He said it that he might become what he is, by his inherent nature. The greatest actor was no god. He played those conceived by others. His life, among those he wanted to love, even among those who loved him, was a turmoil of inept concern. He came from tragic life and begat a life no less tragic. But the open heart of his art unleashed the art of being itself. His eyes had the gleam of the discovered universe, a fleeting glance of eternity, in the look of a moment.

Beyond the Wall of Sorrow

I stood in the ruins of my friend's studio, reminded of the firebombing of foreign cities. What had been, now lay beneath fallen rafters. I climbed a wall to look in at another lost studio, and I fell, climbing back down. I recovered my fall against a fence, feeling faint and thinking of death. The mechanics of the mind sort the cries of the body, mobilized to solve the thought of death. My hands were cold, my eyes looked warily on the world.

I walk to the wall of sorrow to speak joy that's constant in this life. To speak joy from sorrow's side is to dream asleep. My waking spoils the dream. To speak joy from joy leaves sorrow to the camaraderie of its own kind. Joy is not the ventriloquism of the sorrowful. A glimpse of joy is a leaf taken from its vast wilderness. I leave pain behind, to speak joy from within. I leave myself behind, to be genuine in myself to myself.

Let Us Play

I wake each morning from dreams of the night before. I go to sleep each night from dreams of the day before. I know the purity of dreamless sleep. I know the purity of dreamless thought. It's the same as the ground upon which we play. I love my dreams. My friend says he's afraid that, in my love for him, he will disappear. It's true that we have identification in the darkening of our light, but it is our light that unites us as friends. The mind frees the spirit to unite with other parts of itself. We disappear in that love. Let light make love to light. Where is the problem? We are free to play in the sunshine and the dappled shade of our lives.

Roar Like a Lion

A little girl chews her necklace. She moves chairs around like an organizing adult. She climbs on her chair like a lion, ready for the tamer. Her little brother roars his high-pitched young lion's roar and tips his chair like an untamed novice. It's all part of the show. No one's bitten, no one's clawed to death. When they leave, they leave behind tiny strips of torn paper in a pile on the tabletop, the evidence of their ferocity and its careful place in their circus. The poet on the radio, respected and admired, tells a story of people in their lives with a gentle, caring tone, accepting like a blessing the idiosyncrasies of our human condition. It's reassuring to hear someone speak, in a soothing voice, these familiar mundanities with such kindness.

In India, I had no history, no future, no place. I woke from sleeping in my room one morning, and I couldn't remember who I was, where I was, what day it was, what time it was. In no familiar self, I was free in some way I hadn't experienced before. There's nothing wrong with how I like myself, when I hear myself described in loving words, but the part of myself that couldn't care less is a more honest portrait of who I am. It's a face I seldom see, shown back at myself. It's the part that leaves these scraps behind. It's the part that roars when it's time to roar. It's the untamed part that doesn't care where the chairs go.

Green Goes by on the Road

Green goes by on the road in a village in Spain in an earlier time. All the colors are primary. People walk singly or in pairs. Occasionally, small girls and boys run in bunches toward school or away from it. Any activity belongs to whoever is doing it, as they belong to it. Everyone belongs to the town, and the town belongs to them. Then something happens which breaks the belonging apart. It rarely happens to belonging, until belonging is ripped apart, and then it's irreparable. By the end of the story, one longs for what never was, or what was made cinematic from something real. I look across the road at a low fence, with weeds at its foot, with the wind softly blowing.

I loved my hometown in Nebraska, but it no longer exists as it does in memory. I loved my home city in California, but it doesn't exist as it once did. I love the time, this morning, when I felt the place of my being among others, but it's gone now too. I love my life that's gone from my own memory soon enough. So what's my joy in this being? I can't name it. I can't be a speaker of its reality. The imminence of death is said to be a teacher of freedom. It seems to teach those who are already present to being taught. I have loved towns and times, other people and myself. We come and go. This constant readiness to love does not come and go. The pepper in my chai bites my throat and the bite spreads its beauty throughout my body.

Scant History

Walking these tree-lined streets, I love the sense of life as theatrical. I love it as a kind of being on stage, not as performance, but as being in awareness. Nothing, between the curtain's rise and fall, is not a part of this presence. The characters of these actors are not acting. They live in their parts. Every part of every day and every moment of time in every part of every day is

momentous. At the center, is the moment of being. Nothing approximates the fundamental reality. Nothing is more or less theatrical in this theatre of the moment. Everything is its own playwright, its director, and its cast of characters. Everything is its audience. The stage is all the world, and the world is a stage. At its center is the awareness of being at its center. To be at the center of this theatre is to be the whole of it. Presence in this world is more than anything that appears within it, and all of it is scant history to its curtainless eternity.

With Tender Flesh the Avenue

Caught in thwarted thoughts for one who did not match my desire, I find myself still feeling loyal to the idea. We seemed to have a bond beyond formality, but the more we loved in simple recognition, the less we became as lovers. I felt a loss in the heart of the body. By the side of the ocean, in a naked commune of spirit, mind and body, I didn't want others to see my lover's breasts, lest I be seen in seeing her. Her nakedness touched my vulnerability. I couldn't bear to recognize myself in her, easily naked among easily naked others.

As affected as I am by the touch of tender flesh, we were one in the spirit but not the body. My desire longed to cross the uncrossed line. She tells me she's taken to massage, to unknot her pain. "One can only go so long, without being touched," she says. And I remember another love, from long ago, with whom I could touch and be touched by the possibility if not the reality of love. She, too, was indifferent to the open moment of private power, in being without power, when the spirit runs to the surface of the skin. When the spirit wears the skin of lovers, the moment touches the body to its being, from love, to love itself, and back, again, with tender flesh the avenue.

A Cry in the Cells

A cry rises in the cells for what I let be missing in their lives, the affectionate love of another. Living with those of the same ignorance. I carried and shared a kind of ignorance in the life of the body. But the body too knows its inherency. I impose ignorance where ignorance has no home. The mind dissolves to a greater awareness, when the body resolves to a natural knowledge. The kind and caring touch I sought, I find in myself, not in relief from its absence, but in recognition of its native presence.

I sharpen what's been made dull by experience, to be as honest in the physical as I am in the spirit. Blunted by the historical and the personal, I catch glimpses of the fine point of my flesh. What lies within, will seek the surface, despite all that's done to discourage it.

The fine point of my flesh is nowhere in itself a blunt instrument. But I have thrown my body about in pain and pleasure, dulling its graceful instrument, and my cells cry out. The fine point is blunted, but its grace survives, despite trying to hold what can't be held, in hands that have not listened to their cells, in cells that cry for me to hear their clear and simple honesty.

The Borderwalker

She's never left the company of the conventional, despite being a disruptive force. Those inside the borders of a nation foment civil war. Never wanting to live in exile, they cause more trouble than an ex-patriot. Those driven into exile often long for reunion. Those who live abroad for the love of a wider reality, can love and leave, can leave and still love the very things that those who commit to a state of belonging might destroy or be destroyed by, living within its too familiar borders.

The borderwalker walks the border of his tribe with a wide allegiance. He lives in the land between lands. His love for the land whose borders he walks is not separate from his path away from the center. His feet caress the land, his eyes paint its beauty, his tongue tells its wonders, his heart beats its blood. He might be married, because he can't be married. He might stay at home, because he's at home everywhere. He might love one person, because his love isn't in conflict with anyone. Nothing is internecine, when one lives without defined borders. The borderwalker knows where the borders end and where they disappear into each other.

Bowling Lessons

My friend jumps out of his chair to tell of bowling with his father. He's no more isolated in himself than the center is separate from what it centers. The seven deadly sins are merely seven things we do, taken to their hurtful absurdity. His presence is centered in its being, not its persona. He dances, in his visible self, an expression of the fullness of his being. The more he is himself, the more he defines himself a spirit of nameless being. My joy is his presence is not in his name.

His fullness seems to call attention to his definition, but eyes that turn inward see to and from every foundation. From the surface, we make waves that wash ashore and die. From the depths, we show ourselves an ocean without a shore. My friend is afraid, in his loving this way that he'll disappear. We identify our lives in the darkening of our light, but the diffuse and nameless light unites us. The easy mind frees the spirit to be with itself. The ease of the spirit frees these other parts of itself to play in the sunshine and the dappled shade of our lives.

The Old Sailor Baby

His hands were small creatures he couldn't contain. He kept pulling them under his care, lest they be seen in their bestial vitality. They tried to live independent lives, like children crawling away from their mother, only to be pulled back again. He was an old sailor, alone in a bar, with gnarled knuckles, canvas skin, and eyes averted from the crowd. His was a quiet curse that revealed a gentle confusion. He seemed a child in a giant body, who reminded me of my father, who reminded me of myself. He sat by himself at a round table, nursing a beer. We say nursing, when it was the beer that nursed him.

Waiting behind a woman at the Goodwill, I held her baby's bottle, as she made her purchase. The baby girl was almost full of milk, on the edge of sleep and heavy-lidded, like a sliding wall of earth. The child's feet were bare in the carrier, two big toes and eight tiny niblets of pink skin. She suckled on the nipple with less and less enthusiasm. Her little hands let go of the bottle and fell into the air. "A beautiful baby," I said to the mother, stepping into the warm sun of the street. Watching a movie, I cried. It helps my heart to cry, for any reason, for no reason, to be like a baby, to be like a man.

The History of the Body

I put my hand on my own shoulder, the way a friend or a caring lover might. I feel the muscle, not my reaction to it. I habitually touch myself like a dutiful nurse; rarely with the kind and gentle touch I reserve for real and imagined others. Our mother washed our hair at the sink. She scrubbed our scalps with vigor. I learned the technique and carried it forward, as if the body is in need of rigorous scrubbing. We look for others, with love in their hands, to satisfy the need to have our bodies loved. We hire professionals to

approximate a crossbred love, but to touch ourselves with loving care seems anomalous.

We expect to get love from a lover, to give love to a lover, to know what that love is, without loving ourselves in kind. We scrub our own skin and caress another. “Show me how to... what’s it called...oh yes...love.” We forget what we can’t remember. I put my hand on my shoulder and feel the muscle. Curiosity in my fingers awakens my being cared for. My hand moves to my arm. I feel the muscle, beneath the skin. I feel what had not been felt before, without any agenda of the self, here in this simple, grateful body.

The Summer Heat

The man, leaning back, in his cap and short sleeve shirt, speaks his knowledge; seasoned with his opinion, and then he stops talking and listens. His eyes calculate what he might say next, taking in the talk of his companion. His body is a relaxed and tuned muscle, flexing with gesture and expression. He resembles somebody famous, at ease in his posture. His position in life seems secure.

The summer heat is slowly establishing itself. It’s a reminder of how physical one’s thoughts become in the heat, how philosophical they seem in the cold. I stood outside my door, this morning, turning the key in the lock and recognized the sort of thinking that comes over people on vacation, in retirement, back home with the family, or traveling in a foreign country, when the mind gratefully relaxes its prerogatives.

I quietly long to be in a state of productive peace, instead of this refugee camp of the neglected and abandoned citizens of struggle, this planet, this religion of postponed possibilities. Someone once said, “You can’t do that. It’s not done.” It’s true. It’s not done, when you believe you can’t do it. What’s known can be done, and then, what’s done is known. You do it, and it’s done.

No Idea Where to Put Her Petals

In a cool room, she pulls her halter-top by the straps. She rubs her shoulders with the hands of crossed arms. She looks around, with the eyes of one who wishes she were engaged in some passionate activity she’s yet to name. She pulls at her clothing like an alien dressed by other aliens to mix among the

earth people. Summer has come too quickly in her long slow winter of maturation. And then suddenly she's in bloom, and she's got no idea where to put her petals.

There's a sweet pain in her demeanor. Passions of the body flood the confusion of will, and one is compelled, in the midst of not knowing what to do, to do something. In the protocol of obsession, swamped by contraries, and ridden by compulsions, fear is overwhelmed by a surging mindlessness.

Later in life, a parallel occurs, the juggernaut of passion drives to an outlook above the city of one's experience. With the engine still running, a new history begins of one's lifelong contemplation of the essential. Nothing changes in what changes everything. Peace appears in what felt like the frantic center of swirling energy. Passion recognizes its urgency in a calm without confusion. Obsession sheds its old skin, exposing the bones of the inevitable.

The Play of Self-Delighting Pains

I watched one of the teachers speak. He had nothing to teach, and he taught it well, but there are so few ready to recognize their own existence, he became an intellectual entertainment to many of those who came to be with him. Everything's a cliché, until there's a readiness for it, and then it jumps outside itself.

Ciardi talks of the poet John Keats taking "self-delighting pains" to say that nothing we do has lasting significance, including ourselves. Why does he keep speaking, if that's the way he feels? "It's play," Ciardi says, no matter the significance. "It's the play of self-delighting pains." Poetry is play; life is play, being here is the play of all that is.

First one person speaks, then someone else, then more people, then someone new comes in from outside, then more arrive, then there are too many, then there are a few, or two, or one. Characters speak, the playwright speaks, but the play itself is the one speaking. I sit back in the awareness of being. I hear my voice in the play of self-delighting pains. I have nothing to say. I'm ready to listen, and when I am done, I am just begun.

We Say We Love the Sun

The sun seems to paint the landscape, but the sun is a steady light. The landscape paints itself with shapes and shadows, colors and seasons. Our love of the sun is unabated by its constancy. I accept my passage here in the light of its impassive remove. We've loved the sun for so long, without wavering, that one might wonder how we could rouse any passion for it. We say we love the sun, after its light has been obscured, and then it reappears, like an absent love.

We assume that those who live where the sun is faithfully present have a jaded love, but the warmer latitudes are the home of passionate people, not made dull by the presence of such love. The interior sun, allowed to shine, heats its own surface passion. A friend wrote from the city. He said the energy was so intense, he felt creative, even when he wasn't. I prefer it where one's energy isn't mistaken for anyone else's. A steady flame doesn't burn the skin or set the house on fire.

A man I know may have died. A man whose surface fires burn constantly, he was at risk. It costs him to keep himself aflame. He has to keep running to the core to fire his spark, and he keeps forgetting the way. Now, perhaps, his fire is free to burn without his effort. If I die by fire, let me burn. Let me burn, if I die by fire. Bright fires grow quiet, and quiet fires burn bright.

One Comes Upon A Meadow

Unrequited love becomes the only love, in those who can't find a match for the love they have to give. One man resolves that no other can return the love he seeks, that he's the only one capable of such a return. We say God is love, and yet we prefer an image in judgment as large as our imagination. One man seeks a companion who is closer than his thoughts, who occupies him without occupation, as one comes upon a meadow, after a long day's hike in the woods.

As if suddenly, with no break from before, I'm at peace, undefined by surroundings. This man I am gets none of his coloring from his choice of others, of work, or of place. A well-known performer, known for his versatility, integrity and believability, after a long, successful career, playing in the heart of his characters, retires to having no more need to perform. The faces of his layers meet as one, folded back into his unperformed being. He

unseparates himself, and the body of his work follows him back to the center, from which it came.

A Simple Case of Retribution

Cezanne says he's looking for a good cup of coffee, with his hands in his pockets, his shirt tied around his waist, sporting a straw hat over frameless glasses, and a beard, neatly trimmed. His short pants reveal stocky, muscled legs, hairy and tan. He seems content to be doing something mundane, and then his eyes darken, as though a thought has intervened.

A thin man stands waiting, in a short sleeve shirt with large writing on it, "Life is short, Death is sure, Sins the curse, Christ the cure." A young man sits with his young lover, looking at breasts he's seen many times, both lovers with an ordinary ecstasy in their easy demeanor. The setting sun illuminates the East, reflecting on walls and windows. It builds shadows on the far side. A smudged yellow orb hangs in the haze of the horizon.

Cezanne calls his child, and the boy runs around him like a firefly to its flame. A woman, taller than trees, sails by like a schooner on a sleek sea. A black man, in a yellow shirt and green shorts, his long, slicked-back hair tied behind his head, skims across the tile, with a snare brush sound. He moves, light and swift, and he's gone.

If I remember what I am, I instruct my less clear self. "I paint until I laugh," I remind myself, in having no weighted thought. These words come and go, with a weight that lightens, with a light that fades, with weight and light that live on their own.

The Music of the Blooded Air

On the first hot day of the year, bugs jump out of their cocoons and flood the air. One could plant the air and reap a harvest. Everything competes for space in what gives it life. The air is kneaded like dough in muscled hands. Lightnin' Hopkins sits on an old couch, across from another man, with a bottle on the table between them in the sweltering Texas night. The music seeps and squeezes out of the air, it hangs and grips the air, it cries and moans, it comforts and caresses. The music tears at the air, so thick with itself, it can't be torn.

We play the music of the blooded air. In this fertile heat, nothing is unique. The heat lives in what lives in the heat. In the tropics, there's no birth and death in mythic cycle. Both are constant, with no separation to want a metaphor. Seasons don't follow each other like discriminated egos. They pile on top each other in the same time-warped self.

Television makes it difficult to know what's present or past, with everything playing at the same time. The movies started it, when dead actors appear alive in their images. Books started it, when characters come alive as they once lived. Myth started it, when those we eulogize never died and never die. We started it, in the life of our open minds, without borders in time.

I sit where I sat, a year ago, and not much has changed. I could make a list of faces and memories, of terrible things happening in the world, of events predicted to be the scourge of the future, a future rapidly receding into a wave of memory. And I am here, at ease, in the moment of this moment. I tell myself to write this moment's unwritable poem. I laugh at wisdom that fails to daunt the daring.

You Should Save the World

Someone says, "Hey, Jesus, hey, Buddha, you should be a preacher, you should find a mount and deliver a sermon, you should write four principals, you should save the world." Jesus sat on a rock in the desert and said, "I'm not here, I'm not the savior of the world." Buddha sat under a tree and said, "I'm not here, I'm not the savior of the world, there's nothing to be done, and no one to do it." Then Buddha said, "Now I'm ready," and Jesus agreed. "Have you ever read this?" an old girlfriend said of my baby book, "Your mother expected you to save the world."

Millions of mothers have thought the same of millions of children. We're all children of the womb of thought, making plans for a disappearing future. "Take this thought and make something of yourself, we'll all be watching."

I take pains to make something where nothing was, to pass it to another generation, in the open air, on a hill, in the desert, under a tree. I'm not the savior of thought. I face my being, and I birth myself back into the void, not forward into the chronicle of my dramatic history. Every poem points to the space between poems. Every mother is known by her true desire, in the moment before her desire is born.

As Rough Hewn as We Make It

In the artistry of being, an artist looks at unnamed reality and makes a sculpted shape, a sketch, a portrait, in materials not as real as their model. When Pygmalion fell in love with the creation of his desire, his beauty didn't live in the stone. It lived in the unsculpted presence of his own being.

Reality occurs between sheets of glass. One can see through it to the object beyond. One can see oneself in it, as in a mirror, but the real is neither window nor mirror, it lives in the space between the glass. I am neither the world beyond my eyes, or the world behind my sight. I live in the space between my separated selves.

Brilliant Hamlet knows the play of his fate, yet he's dumb to the play of his reality. Recognition rights my ship, in the brilliance of my awareness, even when I'm lost at sea. "Tell my story," Hamlet tells his friend. "And then, silence," he says, and dies. Shakespeare calls angels to accompany his hero, but Hamlet calls no angels. Instead, his presence, even in his absence, outshines the angels' light.

The Electric Ropes of the Mind

I grow tired as I finish my work. My body rests itself, my mind drowns. "There's no such thing as muscle memory," my friend says, "the muscles are ropes, they have no mind to remember themselves." My muscles are the electric ropes of the mind. Repeating an action teaches the minder of the rope, not the rope. Directives of the mind put the mind to sleep. The same directives awaken the mind. Muscles of thought lie in dumb repose or taut readiness, according to what they're shown or told.

Being calls the mind to work. The mind calls the ropes to snake themselves, these snakes have the mind of rope, these ropes have the mind of sticks. These lines are electric rope, these ropes are electric snakes, these snakes are sticks of electricity. No matter which end one lifts, these sticks strike whoever lifts them. At each end of the poem is its beginning, in splinter, in wholeness, in fertility, in decay, in poison and perfect potency, in beauty, truth, and emptiness.

The Laughing Policeman

I neglected my studies, painting at night, sleeping past noon, and when I woke, the president had died, shot riding in a car. I crossed the college commons in an uncommon silence, until I asked a passing stranger and learned the awful news. A nation wept. That night was my first date with my future wife. Despite an inauspicious beginning, we both needed a companion for adulthood. "I'll go, if you'll go," we said. We held hands and jumped. Of four state cops, one roars with laughter. It's rare to hear anyone laugh with such abandon, let alone a man in uniform. He gurgles and bubbles. He coughs, cackles, and giggles. He hacks, and bursts with shouts.

In Senior Shakespeare class, I failed to read the assigned Hamlet, before a quiz. I made a joke that no one enjoyed, and, later, I discovered, in private reading, the prince of my own Denmark. I won't live in this body past its life, no matter how my words live, the good and bad are buried with our bones, alas, poor Yorick.

The laughing policeman fills his ears with his own laughter, as if the circle of men is laughing with him. The other cops, in dulcet tones, know how to handle the familiar scene. When the president died, the great, wide country was filled with the deafening silence of his death. It wafted across Iowa, it coated the Rockies, it quieted the waves on the coast.

I thought we married because we danced well together, as if everything in our marriage would be as harmonious. I left a better partner to be with her. It was nothing relevant. When Ophelia died, Gertrude cried, certain her son would marry the girl, if only the King hadn't been killed. Even contradiction can't explain our dualities. "What are you reading?" Polonius asked Hamlet. "Words... words... words..." the Prince replied.

Chased from Fear to Fire

It's the same for a still mind to write a poem as it is for the profoundly deaf to speak, to take that first step off the edge, to walk in air, out and above one's history. To begin to think, a mechanism begins. To speak, a noise begins, like a tinnitus of the mind, whose stillness reverberates with peace. We disturb our peace to make ourselves known, like dogs who bark to announce their presence, until they sleep, and when they awaken, they make their public pronouncement, over again, endlessly barking their being. We

bark all day, our presence never assured. Those at peace need no such reassurance. We teach ourselves to be insecure, to communicate our insecurities, so we may live in fear with each other. And once begun, the mind chases itself from fear to fire and back from fire to fear.

A cultivated mind may make things of beauty and truth from its seeded self, but the ground is complete before the bloom. We ask the earth for its yield. We disturb it for what it gives us. If we take too much, it seems infertile, but we make it so, until we allow its renewal. A practiced mind crowds its ground with demands. One of my hands lifts a word and the other hand wants to play. This sort of play disturbs my peace, and once disturbed, it's as though peace can be ignored, and ought to be. My hands drop their words. I drop my hands, into their openness. And their fisted fear falls away.

His Once African Face

I turned from the ideal of my dreams, when I stopped dreaming of the other. Dreaming continues, but I don't pursue it into the realm of volition. I don't pursue what continues to invite pursuit, not by her, and not by my thoughts of her, but by the nature of thinking itself. The object of my imagined desire doesn't interest me enough to make it what it doesn't become, on this stormy night, with wind and rain, with summer still weeks away. Its advancing character is revealed in glimpses.

I sit back in eternal ease, unrelated to current realities that live simultaneously, like sitting in the crush of traffic, in the ease of an unthought moment. A peaceful young woman, with Mayan features, sits in the modern world, in the complacency of the ancient young. Her lover arrives, and they embrace. His once African face shows no stress. Their mutual love fills their time with consequence. I am consequent to my dreamless reality when I match what I am to what I'm being, knowing that no dream out dreams its undreamt origin.

The Dawn of the Night

In stillness, lives the poetry of unwritten epiphanies. In the wonder of nature, lives the silent poetry of stillness. The stillness of love for another is another poetry, and none of these words is what they speak. The moon needs no one to name its recognition. My brother turned me toward the ocean and said, "Look at that sunset!" demanding I absorb its beauty. At the end of the day,

there's no more day. At the end of the night, the next day begins. To teach the dreamer to dream well is to point to insight that begins with no beginning or end. I put down my instrument, for the music that no longer interrupts the music. My eyes drift from their focus, so I might begin to see. In the moment of neither the thought described, nor the thought describing it, I'm left wondering at the wonderful. I am wonder itself. Thoughtless in wonder, I am creation, staring back at itself.

Twenty Years in Silence

One sees the time coming, because it's already here, when I love, and I'm loved for my presence in being itself. A teacher spent twenty years in silence. Some say it was his finest teaching, and when he began to speak, he began to be less, so more could know of the stillness he knew. Teaching sets itself apart from what it means to teach, as speaking separates itself from what cannot be said. Building houses, we demonstrate our domesticity, but being at home in myself domiciles my being without it ever becoming domesticated. My clever tongue betrays its message, even as it proclaims it.

A simple man, once upon a time, a long time ago, before the past was invented, before there was a future to color it, noticed his own being, and ran to tell others. The others stared at him in disbelief, until he invented a tongue with marvels born, and enflamed hearts began to dance around its consuming fire. I speak of silence, to quiet my noisy gift, to let stillness seep into my voice, until I'm still, even in my noisy song.

A Greater Being in an Uncertain Reality

We say that when our work is done, we will get to be who we are. We postpone ourselves to the future. We say when our task is finished; we'll act in the moment of our being in the center of our heart. Maybe the moment comes, and maybe it doesn't. True to ourselves, in this moment of reality, the great time that we postpone to the future is no longer awaited but present. If we're taken with the habit of fear, we concern ourselves with lesser fears, and we shun the great fear of finding out who we are.

The great fear of facing who I am can be avoided, if I occupy myself with the concerns of life and death. Face to face with being itself, in a faceless moment, I lose my unsure standing in this uncertain reality. I forfeit my hold, on what lives by its claims, for the surety of having no certain claim. I live to

be the thing I seek in my seeking, upon which I have no claim. Unclaimed by my existence, I am its seed and its fortune.

Oh Jesus of Emily's Heart

She lived with a man who died. Then she lived with a man who had not died. The first kept appearing in the second. The second man looked at her and said, "I'm not against being a home to your first. As long as I am who I am I don't have a problem. You're the one with double vision." She said, "It's difficult seeing two in one, seeing one who's no longer the one he was, in the one who is here now." He wanted to be seen as indivisible, but she stopped seeing him and saw only the other. The mind is autobiographical. It assumes that without it's sense of history, we disappear. But we don't disappear, it does. The only reality of faith is the awareness of the moment of one's own being.

One woman tells another of the savior who died for her, when the only one who can die for anyone's salvation lives within oneself. Whatever is born in one's death is one's saved self, born from one's temporal sacrifice. When I first read Emily Dickinson's poems, I thought, "Oh, Jesus of Emily's heart, you've done your work. Now leave her and let her be free."

What one speaks becomes more clearly a part of one's reality. To read a poem aloud has more power than to read it in one's mind. As you speak the words, place one hand on the book of poems and the other hand in the air, and before and after you read the poem, let there be stillness for the unspoken poem that lives and thrives in the heart of the air.

The House Detective

The rumpled and dismayed house dick sits in the lobby of a rundown hotel. There's nothing for him to do, except he's a thief. He steals from the guests and later recovers enough to prove his worth, so he can keep his job, which, to him, means very little. His room in the hotel is a repository of his swag, but he doesn't care. He's not interested in what he steals, only the theft, and then only for a moment. His satisfaction is short-lived. The hotel is populated by odd characters, of whom he is one of the strangest. And then, one day, he dies, under mysterious circumstances. Police detectives stand over his body, discovered in the midst of his accumulation of stolen artifacts.

The owner of the hotel slumps nearby, after telling of their longtime friendship. One disheveled detective looks down at the crumpled body and says, to no one in particular, “Now that’s a sad fuckin’ story, innit??

Down by the Banks of the River

The setting sun bakes my face, as I remember the taste of gin, from when I drank gin, that summer in Illinois. The sun was hot after work in the late hours of the afternoon, in my room in the old building in Rock Island down by the river. It was the summer after school, the summer before I married, two years before the Summer of Love in San Francisco, where my marriage ended, eight years later, but that summer I was still young enough to believe myself free of social definition.

Now I sit in the sun in the Cascade foothills, thinking of moving back to my adult hometown, called Frisco, by those who don’t live there, and the sun conjures images of drinking gin in my third floor room, in the picturesque and dilapidated house in the town next to the town where I was born.

The sun is blocked and then comes back, and the feeling comes back with it. I let it bake me, like having a warm liquid poured into my body until my body feels more fluid than vessel. My thoughts and feelings turn to heat. This time I don’t need the gin. The warmth of the sun stirs the feeling I’m happy to feel. It doesn’t make me want to drink. Instead, I become another presence of heat itself. I write my story backwards, from the image to the source, and I’m done.

Kicked Back to Sand

Four Tibetan monks spend a day, making an intricate sand painting in an airport lobby. Their mandala is protected by a ring of velvet ropes until a small boy runs under the flimsy barrier and kicks the painting back to sand. The boy’s mother turns to see where her boy has gone, and pulls him away, with no sign of alarm or regret.

The monks laugh, their art is temporal, and the boy is an agent of the temporal. Like the attention of the mother for her son, neither is concerned about the consequence of their agency. Agents of the temporal run wild. What remains is the airport floor, the sand, and the earth beneath the land beneath the sky.

Sitting Bull complained to the government agent that they were taking the sacred lands of the Sioux for their own, and the agent laughed. He cited the history of the Ojibwa, running the Sioux out of Minnesota, the Sioux, running the Pawnee out of the Dakotas. "You may call it spiritual," he said to the old chief, "but it's nothing new, and it's certainly not sacred."

The slaughter of native peoples continues apace, until the idea becomes repugnant. The spiritual accrues to the land beneath the rampage, and if the climate is destroyed by our abuse, the earth will survive. The folly will end, along with our temporary agency, no matter how sacred or profane we name it ours.

Cradled in the Arms of Not Knowing

As a child becoming a man, I wanted to make the unknown known, until I faced the unknowable unknown. I hesitated, before I stepped into myself, it became only a matter of how far. Taught to leap to the safety of others' conclusions, before the knowing's known had seen its face, boned of ease, of grace, and gaunt, I deferred to those with answers, before I could find my own.

Between knowable and unknown, I yearned to face what I feared to face, until I did it, alone, with no preparation, in a courtesy of terror, in a leap of faith, a leap without legs, across a chasm without character, letting go of the knowing of knowledge, my champion.

Leaping from a plane, strapped to someone else, we try to lose ourselves to gain ourselves, but every advantage we gain in depending on others is futile, except to be done with at the leaping off point. We leap, with nothing and no one to tell us what we'll find in the leaping. The lap of eternity is not given to those who cannot leave the arms of knowing.

The body has no memory of this brilliance, and the mind can't be used to tool its freedom. I am its grant, its passage, and its arrival. I am the being of being itself, discovered in being who I am.

So Often Away in Paradise

A poet reads her tale of Blake's wife, who said she missed her husband, "He was so often away in paradise." This is the propaganda of escape that denies the force of the discovered reality. Blake and his wife welcomed spirits to their table. They climbed naked in the backyard tree.

This is the propaganda of spiritual romance. We so habitually clothe our freedom that our tales of it become costume dramas. Rumi wrote love poems to the Beloved, when his honest asides were of being in nameless existence. As a spokesman for religious others, it was customary to dress his bare grace in garments of glory, but the emperor of existence is absent from the clothier.

How do I admire existence, if it's naked of any form, except I praise everything that might be its clothing. This path of praise I allow in myself is my human urge to clothe what I am, instead of standing alone in its naked beauty. Undressed existence is too much beauty for these rags in words.

How Beautiful It Is To Be Alone

After the aloneness of the body, nothing so surprised me as the aloneness of the soul. Anything that forms a soul is alone. The being of the soul needs another soul, like a god, to protect it from its aloneness.

Oneness is a truth and a deception. Oneness careens in the mind, like good drugs, as true as last night's drunkenness. Sobriety destroys the kindness of the illusion of the separated soul. Sobriety is a toxin, as sinful and adjudicated as the church runs the hiding from God.

There's nothing more terrible than being alone. It is the truth. How beautiful it is to be alone. Aloneness is the opening to no thought, of self, or the self of the soul. Aloneness in the soul is the last refuge of the illusion of separation.

How beautiful it is to be alone. How beautiful to be a soul. How beautiful it is to be beyond being alone. How beautiful to be beyond a separated soul. I'm no one to think myself alone. In being itself, I've never been less alone.